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# R O M O L A .

BY

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# CONTENTS

## TO THE SECOND VOLUME.



### BOOK II.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. FLORENCE EXPECTS A GUEST.....	1
II. THE PRISONERS.....	14
III. AFTER-THOUGHTS .....	27
IV. INSIDE THE DUOMO .....	33
V. OUTSIDE THE DUOMO .....	44
VI. THE GARMENT OF FEAR .....	52
VII. THE YOUNG WIFE .....	61
VIII. THE PAINTED RECORD .....	79
IX. A MOMENT OF TRIUMPH .....	88
X. THE AVENGER'S SECRET.....	100
XI. FRUIT IS SEED .....	116
XII. A REVELATION .....	125
XIII. BALDASSARRE MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE .....	143
XIV. NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE.....	157

CHAP.	PAGE
XV. WHAT FLORENCE WAS THINKING OF .....	177
XVI. ARIADNE DISCROWNS HERSELF.....	184
XVII. THE TABERNACLE UNLOCKED .....	202
XVIII. THE BLACK MARKS BECOME MAGICAL .....	210
XIX. A SUPPER IN THE RUCELLAI GARDENS .....	221
XX. AN ARRESTING VOICE .....	250
XXI. COMING BACK .....	265

## BOOK III.

XXII. ROMOLA IN HER PLACE .....	271
XXIII. THE UNSEEN MADONNA .....	284
XXIV. THE VISIBLE MADONNA .....	295
XXV. AT THE BARBER'S SHOP .....	305
XXVI. BY A STREET LAMP .....	320

# R O M O L A.

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## B O O K I I.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### FLORENCE EXPECTS A GUEST.

IT was the seventeenth of November, 1494: more than eighteen months since Tito and Romola had been finally united in the joyous Easter time, and had had a rainbow-tinted shower of comfits thrown over them, after the ancient Greek fashion, in token that the heavens would shower sweets on them through all their double life.

Since that Easter time a great change had come over the prospects of Florence; and as in the tree that bears a myriad of blossoms, each single bud with its fruit is dependent on the primary circulation of the sap, so the fortunes of Tito and Romola were dependent on certain grand political and social conditions which made an epoch in the history of Italy.

In this very November, little more than a week ago, the spirit of the old centuries seemed to have re-entered the breasts of Florentines. The great bell in the Palace tower had rung out the hammer-sound of alarm, and the people had mustered with their rusty arms, their tools and impromptu cudgels, to drive out the Medici. The gate of San Gallo had been fairly shut on the arrogant, exasperating Piero, galloping away towards Bologna with his hired horsemen frightened behind him, and on his keener young brother, the cardinal, escaping in the disguise of a Franciscan monk; and a price had been set on their heads. After that, there had been some sacking of houses, according to old precedent; the ignominious images, painted on the public buildings, of the men who had conspired against the Medici in days gone by, were effaced; the exiled enemies of the Medici were invited home. The half-fledged tyrants were fairly out of their splendid nest in the Via Larga, and the Republic had recovered the use of its will again.

But now, a week later, the great palace in the Via Larga had been prepared for the reception of another tenant; and if drapery roofing the streets with unwonted colour, if banners and hangings pouring out from the windows, if carpets and tapestry stretched over all steps and pavement on which exceptional feet might tread, were an unquestionable proof of joy, Florence was very joyful in the expect-

tation of its new guest. The stream of colour flowed from the Palace in the Via Larga round by the Cathedral, then by the great Piazza della Signoria, and across the Ponte Vecchio to the Porta San Frediano—the gate that looks towards Pisa. There, near the gate, a platform and canopy had been erected for the Signoria; and Messer Luca Corsini, doctor of law, felt his heart palpitating a little with the sense that he had a Latin oration to read; and every chief elder in Florence had to make himself ready, with smooth chin and well-lined silk lucco, to walk in procession; and the well-born youths were looking at their rich new tunics after the French mode which was to impress the stranger as having a peculiar grace when worn by Florentines; and a large body of the clergy, from the archbishop in his effulgence to the train of monks, black, white, and grey, were consulting betimes in the morning how they should marshal themselves, with their burden of relics and sacred banners and consecrated jewels, that their movements might be adjusted to the expected arrival of the illustrious visitor, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

An unexampled visitor! For he had come through the passes of the Alps with such an army as Italy had not seen before: with thousands of terrible Swiss, well used to fight for love and hatred as well as for hire; with a host of gallant cavaliers proud of a name; with an unprecedented infantry, in which

every man in a hundred carried an arquebus; nay, with cannon of bronze shooting not stones but iron balls, drawn not by bullocks but by horses, and capable of firing a second time before a city could mend the breach made by the first ball. Some compared the new comer to Charlemagne, reputed re-builder of Florence, welcome conqueror of degenerate kings, regulator and benefactor of the Church; some preferred the comparison to Cyrus, liberator of the chosen people, restorer of the Temple. For he had come across the Alps with the most glorious projects: he was to march through Italy amidst the jubilees of a grateful and admiring people; he was to satisfy all conflicting complaints at Rome; he was to take possession, by virtue of hereditary right and a little fighting, of the kingdom of Naples; and from that convenient starting-point he was to set out on the conquest of the Turks, who were partly to be cut to pieces and partly converted to the faith of Christ. It was a scheme that seemed to befit the Most Christian King, head of a nation which, thanks to the devices of a subtle Louis the Eleventh who had died in much fright as to his personal prospects ten years before, had become the strongest of Christian monarchies; and this antitype of Cyrus and Charlemagne was no other than the son of that subtle Louis—the young Charles the Eighth of France.

Surely, on a general statement, hardly anything could seem more grandiose, or fitter to revive in the



breasts of men the memory of great dispensations by which new strata had been laid in the history of mankind. And there was a very widely spread conviction that the advent of the French King and his army into Italy was one of those events at which marble statues might well be believed to perspire, phantasmal fiery warriors to fight in the air, and quadrupeds to bring forth monstrous births—that it did not belong to the usual order of Providence, but was in a peculiar sense the work of God. It was a conviction that rested less on the necessarily momentous character of a powerful foreign invasion than on certain moral emotions to which the aspect of the times gave the form of presentiments: emotions which had found a very remarkable utterance in the voice of a single man.

That man was Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Prior of the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence. On a September morning, when men's ears were ringing with the news that the French army had entered Italy, he had preached in the Cathedral of Florence from the text, "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth." He believed it was by supreme guidance that he had reached just so far in his exposition of Genesis the previous Lent; and he believed the "flood of waters"—emblem at once of avenging wrath and purifying mercy—to be the divinely indicated symbol of the French army. His audience, some of whom were held to be among

the choicest spirits of the age—the most cultivated men in the most cultivated of Italian cities—believed it too, and listened with shuddering awe. For this man had a power rarely paralleled, of impressing his beliefs on others, and of swaying very various minds. And as long as four years ago he had proclaimed from the chief pulpit of Florence that a scourge was about to descend on Italy, and that by this scourge the Church was to be purified. Savonarola appeared to believe, and his hearers more or less waveringly believed, that he had a mission like that of the Hebrew prophets, and that the Florentines amongst whom his message was delivered were in some sense a second chosen people. The idea of prophetic gifts was not a remote one in that age: seers of visions, circumstantial heralds of things to be, were far from uncommon either outside or inside the cloister; but this very fact made Savonarola stand out the more conspicuously as a grand exception. While in others the gift of prophecy was very much like a farthing candle illuminating small corners of human destiny with prophetic gossip, in Savonarola it was like a mighty beacon shining far out for the warning and guidance of men. And to some of the soberest minds the supernatural character of his insight into the future gathered a strong attestation from the peculiar conditions of the age.

At the close of 1492, the year in which Lorenzo de' Medici died and Tito Melema came as a wanderer

to Florence, Italy was enjoying a peace and prosperity unthreatened by any near and definite danger. There was no fear of famine, for the seasons had been plenteous in corn, and wine, and oil; new palaces had been rising in all fair cities, new villas on pleasant slopes and summits; and the men who had more than their share of these good things were in no fear of the larger number who had less. For the citizens' armour was getting rusty, and populations seemed to have become tame, licking the hands of masters who paid for a ready-made army when they wanted it, as they paid for goods of Smyrna. Even the fear of the Turk had ceased to be active, and the Pope found it more immediately profitable to accept bribes from him for a little prospective poisoning than to form plans either for conquering or for converting him.

Altogether, this world, with its partitioned empire and its roomy universal Church, seemed to be a handsome establishment for the few who were lucky or wise enough to reap the advantages of human folly: a world in which lust and obscenity, lying and treachery, oppression and murder, were pleasant, useful, and, when properly managed, not dangerous. And as a sort of fringe or adornment to the substantial delights of tyranny, avarice, and lasciviousness, there was the patronage of polite learning and the fine arts, so that flattery could always be had in the choicest Latin to be commanded at that time, and

sublime artists were at hand to paint the holy and the unclean with impartial skill. The Church, it was said, had never been so disgraced in its head, had never shown so few signs of renovating, vital belief in its lower members; nevertheless it was much more prosperous than in some past days. The heavens were fair and smiling above; and below there were no signs of earthquake.

Yet at that time, as we have seen, there was a man in Florence who for two years and more had been preaching that a scourge was at hand; that the world was certainly not framed for the lasting convenience of hypocrites, libertines, and oppressors. From the midst of those smiling heavens he had seen a sword hanging—the sword of God's justice—which was speedily to descend with purifying punishment on the Church and the world. In brilliant Ferrara, seventeen years before, the contradiction between men's lives and their professed beliefs had pressed upon him with a force that had been enough to destroy his appetite for the world, and at the age of twenty-three had driven him into the cloister. He believed that God had committed to the Church the sacred lamp of truth for the guidance and salvation of men, and he saw that the Church, in its corruption, had become as a sepulchre to hide the lamp. As the years went on scandals increased and multiplied, and hypocrisy seemed to have given place to impudence. Had the world, then, ceased to have a

righteous Ruler? Was the Church finally forsaken? No, assuredly: in the Sacred Book there was a record of the past in which might be seen as in a glass what would be in the days to come, and the book showed that when the wickedness of the chosen people, type of the Christian Church, had become crying, the judgments of God had descended on them. Nay, reason itself declared that vengeance was imminent, for what else would suffice to turn men from their obstinacy in evil? And unless the Church were reclaimed, how could the promises be fulfilled, that the heathens should be converted and the whole world become subject to the one true law? He had seen his belief reflected in visions—a mode of seeing which had been frequent with him from his youth up.

But the real force of demonstration for Girolamo Savonarola lay in his own burning indignation at the sight of wrong; in his fervent belief in an Unseen Justice that would put an end to the wrong, and in an Unseen Purity to which lying and uncleanness were an abomination. To his ardent, power-loving soul, believing in great ends, and longing to achieve those ends by the exertion of its own strong will, the faith in a supreme and righteous Ruler became one with the faith in a speedy divine interposition that would punish and reclaim.

Meanwhile, under that splendid masquerade of dignities sacred and secular which seemed to make the life of lucky Churchmen and princely families so

luxurious and amusing, there were certain conditions at work which slowly tended to disturb the general festivity. Ludovico Sforza—copious in gallantry, splendid patron of an incomparable Lionardo da Vinci—holding the ducal crown of Milan in his grasp, and wanting to put it on his own head rather than let it rest on that of a feeble nephew who would take very little to poison him, was much afraid of the Spanish-born old King Ferdinand and the Crown Prince Alfonso of Naples, who, not liking cruelty and treachery which were useless to themselves, objected to the poisoning of a near relative for the advantage of a Lombard usurper; the royalties of Naples again were afraid of their suzerain, Pope Alexander Borgia; all three were anxiously watching Florence, lest with its midway territory it should determine the game by underhand backing; and all four, with every small State in Italy, were afraid of Venice—Venice the cautious, the stable, and the strong, that wanted to stretch its arms not only along both sides of the Adriatic but across to the ports of the western coast.

Lorenzo de' Medici, it was thought, did much to prevent the fatal outbreak of such jealousies, keeping up the old Florentine alliance with Naples and the Pope, and yet persuading Milan that the alliance was for the general advantage. But young Piero de' Medici's rash vanity had quickly nullified the effect of his father's wary policy, and Ludovico Sforza,

roused to suspicion of a league against him, thought of a move which would checkmate his adversaries: he determined to invite the French king to march into Italy and, as heir of the house of Anjou, to take possession of Naples. Ambassadors — “orators,” as they were called in those haranguing times—went and came; a recusant cardinal, determined not to acknowledge a Pope elected by bribery, and his own particular enemy, went and came also, and seconded the invitation with hot rhetoric; and the young king seemed to lend a willing ear. So that in 1493 the rumour spread and became louder and louder that Charles the Eighth of France was about to cross the Alps with a mighty army; and the Italian populations, accustomed, since Italy had ceased to be the heart of the Roman empire, to look for an arbitrator from afar, began vaguely to regard his coming as a means of avenging their wrongs and redressing their grievances.

And in that rumour Savonarola had heard the assurance that his prophecy was being verified. What was it that filled the ear of the prophets of old but the distant tread of foreign armies, coming to do the work of justice? He no longer looked vaguely to the horizon for the coming storm: he pointed to the rising cloud. The French army was that new deluge which was to purify the earth from iniquity; the French king, Charles VIII., was the instrument elected by God, as Cyrus had been of old, and all

men who desired good rather than evil were to rejoice in his coming. For the scourge would fall destructively on the impenitent alone. Let any city of Italy, let Florence above all—Florence beloved of God, since to its ear the warning voice had been specially sent—repent and turn from its ways, like Nineveh of old, and the storm-cloud would roll over it and leave only refreshing rain-drops.

Fra Girolamo's word was powerful; yet now that the new Cyrus had already been three months in Italy, and was not far from the gates of Florence, his presence was expected there with mixed feelings, in which fear and distrust certainly predominated. At present it was not understood that he had redressed any grievances; and the Florentines clearly had nothing to thank him for. He held their strong frontier fortresses, which Piero de' Medici had given up to him without securing any honourable terms in return; he had done nothing to quell the alarming revolt of Pisa, which had been encouraged by his presence to throw off the Florentine yoke; and "orators," even with a prophet at their head, could win no assurance from him, except that he would settle everything when he was once within the walls of Florence. Still, there was the satisfaction of knowing that the exasperating Piero de' Medici had been fairly pelted out for the ignominious surrender of the fortresses, and in that act of energy the spirit of the Republic had recovered some of its old fire.



The preparations for the equivocal guest were not entirely those of a city resigned to submission. Behind the bright drapery and banners symbolical of joy, there were preparations of another sort made with common accord by government and people. Well hidden within walls there were hired soldiers of the Republic, hastily called in from the surrounding districts ; there were old arms newly furbished, and sharp tools and heavy cudgels laid carefully at hand, to be snatched up on short notice ; there were excellent boards and stakes to form barricades upon occasion, and a good supply of stones to make a surprising hail from the upper windows. Above all, there were people very strongly in the humour for fighting any personage who might be supposed to have designs of hectoring over them, having lately tasted that new pleasure with much relish. This humour was not diminished by the sight of occasional parties of Frenchmen, coming beforehand to choose their quarters, with a hawk, perhaps, on their left wrist, and, metaphorically speaking, a piece of chalk in their right hand to mark Italian doors withal ; especially as credible historians imply that many sons of France were at that time characterized by something approaching to a swagger, which must have whetted the Florentine appetite for a little stone-throwing.

And this was the temper of Florence on the morning of the seventeenth of November, 1494.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PRISONERS.

THE sky was grey, but that made little difference in the Piazza del Duomo, which was covered with its holiday sky of blue drapery, and its constellations of yellow lilies and coats of arms. The sheaves of banners were unfurled at the angles of the Baptistery, but there was no carpet yet on the steps of the Duomo, for the marble was being trodden by numerous feet that were not at all exceptional. It was the hour of the Advent sermons, and the very same reasons which had flushed the streets with holiday colour were reasons why the preaching in the Duomo could least of all be dispensed with.

But not all the feet in the Piazza were hastening towards the steps. People of high and low degree were moving to and fro with the brisk pace of men who had errands before them; groups of talkers were thickly scattered, some willing to be late for the sermon, others content not to hear it at all.

The expression on the faces of these apparent loungers was not that of men who are enjoying the

pleasant laziness of an opening holiday. Some were in close and eager discussion; others were listening with keen interest to a single spokesman, and yet from time to time turned round with a scanning glance at any new passer-by. At the corner, looking towards the Via de' Cerretani—just where the artificial rainbow light of the Piazza ceased, and the grey morning fell on the sombre stone houses—there was a remarkable cluster of the working people, most of them bearing on their dress or persons the signs of their daily labour, and almost all of them carrying some weapon, or some tool which might serve as a weapon upon occasion. Standing in the grey light of the street, with bare brawny arms and soiled garments, they made all the more striking the transition from the brightness of the Piazza. They were listening to the thin notary, Ser Cioni, who had just paused on his way to the Duomo. His biting words could get only a contemptuous reception two years and a half before in the Mercato, but now he spoke with the more complacent humour of a man whose party is uppermost, and who is conscious of some influence with the people.

“Never talk to me,” he was saying, in his incisive voice, “never talk to me of bloodthirsty Swiss or fierce French infantry: they might as well be in the narrow passes of the mountains as in our streets; and peasants have destroyed the finest armies of our condottieri in time past, when they had once got them

between steep precipices. I tell you, Florentines need be afraid of no army in their own streets."

"That's true, Ser Cioni," said a man whose arms and hands were discoloured by crimson dye, which looked like bloodstains, and who had a small hatchet stuck in his belt; "and those French cavaliers, who came in squaring themselves in their smart doublets the other day, saw a sample of the dinner we could serve up for them. I was carrying my cloth in Ognissanti, when I saw my fine Messeri going by, looking round as if they thought the houses of the Vespucci and the Agli a poor pick of lodgings for them, and eyeing us Florentines, like top-knotted cocks as they are, as if they pitied us because we didn't know how to strut. 'Yes, my fine *Galli*,' says I, 'stick out your stomachs, I've got a meat-axe in my belt that will go inside you all the easier;' when presently the old cow lowed,\* and I knew something had happened—no matter what. So I threw my cloth in at the first doorway, and took hold of my meat-axe and ran after my fine cavaliers towards the Vigna Nuova. And, 'What is it, Guccio?' said I, when he came up with me. 'I think it's the Medici coming back,' said Guccio. *Bembè!* I expected so! And up we reared a barricade, and the Francesi looked behind and saw themselves in a trap; and up comes

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\* "*La vacca muglia*" was the phrase for the sounding of the great bell in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio.

a good swarm of our *Ciompì*,\* and one of them with a big scythe he had in his hand mowed off one of the fine cavalier's feathers:—it's true! And the lasses peppered a few stones down to frighten them. However, Piero de' Medici wasn't come after all; and it was a pity; for we'd have left him neither legs nor wings to go away with again."

"Well spoken, Oddo," said a young butcher, with his knife at his belt, "and it's my belief Piero will be a good while before he wants to come back, for he looked as frightened as a hunted chicken, when we hustled and pelted him in the piazza. He's a coward, else he might have made a better stand when he'd got his horsemen. But we'll swallow no Medici any more, whatever else the French king wants to make us swallow."

"But I like not those French cannon [they talk of," said Goro, none the less fat for two years' additional grievances. "San Giovanni defend us! If Messer Domeneddio means so well by us as your Frate says he does, Ser Cioni, why shouldn't he have sent the French another way to Naples?"

"Ay, Goro," said the dyer; "that's a question worth putting. Thou art not such a pumpkin-head as I took thee for. Why, they might have gone to Naples by Bologna, eh, Ser Cioni? or if they'd gone

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\* The poorer artisans connected with the wool trade—wool-beaters, carders, washers, &c.

to Arezzo—we wouldn't have minded their going to Arezzo."

"Fools! It will be for the good and glory of Florence," Ser Cioni began. But he was interrupted by the exclamation, "Look there!" which burst from several voices at once, while the faces were all turned to a party who were advancing along the Via de' Cerretani.

"It's Lorenzo Tornabuoni, and one of the French noblemen who are in his house," said Ser Cioni, in some contempt at this interruption. "He pretends to look well satisfied—that deep Tornabuoni—but he's a Medicean in his heart: mind that."

The advancing party was rather a brilliant one, for there was not only the distinguished presence of Lorenzo Tornabuoni, and the splendid costume of the Frenchman with his elaborately displayed white linen and gorgeous embroidery; there were two other Florentines of high birth in handsome dresses donned for the coming procession, and on the left hand of the Frenchman was a figure that was not to be eclipsed by any amount of intension or brocade—a figure we have often seen before. He wore nothing but black, for he was in mourning; but the black was presently to be covered by a red mantle, for he too was to walk in procession as Latin Secretary to the Ten. Tito Melema had become conspicuously serviceable in the intercourse with the French guests, from his familiarity with Southern Italy, and his

readiness in the French tongue, which he had spoken in his early youth; and he had paid more than one visit to the French camp at Signa. The lustre of good fortune was upon him; he was smiling, listening, and explaining, with his usual graceful unpretentious ease, and only a very keen eye bent on studying him could have marked a certain amount of change in him which was not to be accounted for by the lapse of eighteen months. It was that change which comes from the final departure of moral youthfulness—from the distinct self-conscious adoption of a part in life. The lines of the face were as soft as ever, the eyes as pellucid; but something was gone—something as indefinable as the changes in the morning twilight.

The Frenchman was gathering instructions concerning ceremonial before riding back to Signa, and now he was going to have a final survey of the Piazza del Duomo, where the royal procession was to pause for religious purposes. The distinguished party attracted the notice of all eyes as it entered the piazza, but the gaze was not entirely cordial and admiring; there were remarks not altogether allusive and mysterious to the Frenchman's hoof-shaped shoes—delicate flattery of royal superfluity in toes; and there was no care that certain snarlings at "Mediceans" should be strictly inaudible. But Lorenzo Tornabuoni possessed that power of dissembling annoyance which is demanded in a man who courts

popularity, and to Tito's natural disposition to overcome ill-will by good-humour, there was added the unimpassioned feeling of the alien towards names and details that move the deepest passions of the native.

Arrived where they could get a good oblique view of the Duomo, the party paused. The festoons and devices that had been placed over the central doorway excited some demur, and Tornabuoni beckoned to Piero di Cosimo, who, as was usual with him at this hour, was lounging in front of Nello's shop. There was soon an animated discussion, and it became highly amusing from the Frenchman's astonishment at Piero's odd pungency of statement, which Tito translated literally. Even snarling on-lookers became curious, and their faces began to wear the half-smiling, half-humiliated expression of people who are not within hearing of the joke which is producing infectious laughter. It was a delightful moment for Tito, for he was the only one of the party who could have made so amusing an interpreter, and without any disposition to triumphant self-gratulation he revelled in the sense that he was an object of liking—he basked in approving glances. The rainbow light fell about the laughing group, and the grave church-goers had all disappeared within the walls. It seemed as if the piazza had been decorated for a real Florentine holiday.

Meanwhile in the grey light of the unadorned



streets there were on-comers who made no show of linen and brocade, and whose humour was far from merry. Here, too, the French dress and hooped shoes were conspicuous, but they were being pressed upon by a larger and larger number of non-admiring Florentines. In the van of the crowd were three men in scanty clothing; each had his hands bound together by a cord, and a rope was fastened round his neck and body, in such a way that he who held the extremity of the rope might easily check any rebellious movement by the threat of throttling. The men who held the ropes were French soldiers, and by broken Italian phrases and strokes from the knotted end of the rope, they from time to time stimulated their prisoners to beg. Two of them were obedient, and to every Florentine they had encountered had held out their bound hands and said in piteous tones,

“For the love of God and the Holy Madonna, give us something towards our ransom! We are Tuscans: we were made prisoners in Lunigiana.”

But the third man remained obstinately silent under all the strokes from the knotted cord. He was very different in aspect from his two fellow-prisoners. They were young and hardy, and, in the scant clothing which the avarice of their captors had left them, looked like vulgar, sturdy mendicants. But he had passed the boundary of old age, and could hardly be less than four or five and sixty.

His beard, which had grown long in neglect, and the hair which fell thick and straight round his baldness, were nearly white. His thickset figure was still firm and upright, though emaciated, and seemed to express energy in spite of age—an expression that was partly carried out in the dark eyes and strong dark eyebrows, which had a strangely isolated intensity of colour in the midst of his yellow, bloodless, deep-wrinkled face with its lank grey hairs. And yet there was something fitful in the eyes which contradicted the occasional flash of energy: after looking round with quick fierceness at windows and faces, they fell again with a lost and wandering look. But his lips were motionless, and he held his hands resolutely down. He would not beg.

This sight had been witnessed by the Florentines with growing exasperation. Many standing at their doors or passing quietly along had at once given money—some in half-automatic response to an appeal in the name of God, others in that unquestioning awe of the French soldiery which had been created by the reports of their cruel warfare, and on which the French themselves counted as a guarantee of immunity in their acts of insolence. But as the group had proceeded farther into the heart of the city, that compliance had gradually disappeared, and the soldiers found themselves escorted by a gathering troop of men and boys, who kept up a chorus of exclamations sufficiently intelligible to foreign ears

without any interpreter. The soldiers themselves began to dislike their position, for, with a strong inclination to use their weapons, they were checked by the necessity for keeping a secure hold on their prisoners, and they were now hurrying along in the hope of finding shelter in a hostelry.

“French dogs!” “Bullock-feet!” “Snatch their pikes from them!” “Cut the cords and make them run for their prisoners. They’ll run as fast as geese—don’t you see they’re web-footed?” These were the cries which the soldiers vaguely understood to be jeers, and probably threats. But every one seemed disposed to give invitations of this spirited kind rather than to act upon them.

“Santiddio! here’s a sight!” said the dyer, as soon as he had divined the meaning of the advancing tumult, “and the fools do nothing but hoot. Come along!” he added, snatching his axe from his belt, and running to join the crowd, followed by the butcher and all the rest of his companions except Goro, who hastily retreated up a narrow passage.

The sight of the dyer, running forward with blood-red arms and axe uplifted, and with his cluster of rough companions behind him, had a stimulating effect on the crowd. Not that he did anything else than pass beyond the soldiers and thrust himself well among his fellow-citizens, flourishing his axe; but he served as a stirring symbol of street-fighting, like the waving of a well-known gonfalon. And the first

sign that fire was ready to burst out was something as rapid as a little leaping tongue of flame: it was an act of the conjuror's impish lad Lollo, who was dancing and jeering in front of the ingenuous boys that made the majority of the crowd. Lollo had no great compassion for the prisoners, but being conscious of an excellent knife which was his unfailing companion, it had seemed to him from the first that to jump forward, cut a rope, and leap back again before the soldier who held it could use his weapon, would be an amusing and dexterous piece of mischief. And now, when the people began to hoot and jostle more vigorously, Lollo felt that his moment was come—he was close to the eldest prisoner: in an instant he had cut the cord.

“Run, old one!” he piped in the prisoner's ear, as soon as the cord was in two; and himself set the example of running as if he were helped along with wings, like a scared fowl.

The prisoner's sensations were not too slow for him to seize the opportunity: the idea of escape had been continually present with him, and he had gathered fresh hope from the temper of the crowd. He ran at once; but his speed would hardly have sufficed for him if the Florentines had not instantaneously rushed between him and his captor. He ran on into the piazza, but he quickly heard the tramp of feet behind him, for the other two prisoners had been released, and the soldiers were struggling and fight-

ing their way after them, in such tardigrade fashion as their hoof-shaped shoes would allow—impeded, but not very resolutely attacked, by the people. One of the two younger prisoners turned up the Borgo di San Lorenzo, and thus made a partial diversion of the hubbub; but the main struggle was still towards the piazza, where all eyes were turned on it with alarmed curiosity. The cause could not be precisely guessed, for the French dress was screened by the impeding crowd.

“An escape of prisoners,” said Lorenzo Tornabuoni, as he and his party turned round just against the steps of the Duomo, and saw a prisoner rushing by them. “The people are not content with having emptied the Bargello the other day. If there is no other authority in sight they must fall on the sbirri and secure freedom to thieves. Ah! there is a French soldier: that is more serious.”

The soldier he saw was struggling along on the north side of the piazza, but the object of his pursuit had taken the other direction. That object was the eldest prisoner, who had wheeled round the Baptistery and was running towards the Duomo, determined to take refuge in that sanctuary rather than trust to his speed. But in mounting the steps, his foot received a shock; he was precipitated towards the group of signori, whose backs were turned to him, and was only able to recover his balance as he clutched one of them by the arm.

It was Tito Melema who felt that clutch. He turned his head, and saw the face of his adoptive father, Baldassarre Calvo, close to his own.

The two men looked at each other, silent as death: Baldassarre, with dark fierceness and a tightening grip of the soiled worn hands on the velvet-clad arm; Tito, with cheeks and lips all bloodless, fascinated by terror. It seemed a long while to them—it was but a moment.

The first sound Tito heard was the short laugh of Piero di Cosimo, who stood close by him and was the only person that could see his face.

“Ha, ha! I know what a ghost should be now.”

“This is another escaped prisoner,” said Lorenzo Tornabuoni. “Who is he, I wonder?”

“*Some madman, surely,*” said Tito.

He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation.

The two men had not taken their eyes off each other, and it seemed to Tito, when he had spoken, that some magical poison had darted from Baldassarre’s eyes, and that he felt it rushing through his veins. But the next instant the grasp on his arm had relaxed, and Baldassarre had disappeared within the church.

## CHAPTER III.

## AFTER-THOUGHTS.

“ You are easily frightened, though,” said Piero, with another scornful laugh. “ My portrait is not as good as the original. But the old fellow *had* a tiger look: I must go into the Duomo and see him again.”

“ It is not pleasant to be laid hold of by a madman, if madman he be,” said Lorenzo Tornabuoni, in polite excuse of Tito, “ but perhaps he is only a ruffian. We shall hear. I think we must see if we have authority enough to stop this disturbance between our people and your countrymen,” he added, addressing the Frenchman.

They advanced towards the crowd with their swords drawn, all the quiet spectators making an escort for them. Tito went too: it was necessary that he should know what others knew about Baldassarre, and the first palsy of terror was being succeeded by the rapid devices to which mortal danger will stimulate the timid.

The rabble of men and boys, more inclined to hoot at the soldier and torment him than to receive or

inflict any serious wounds, gave way at the approach of signori with drawn swords, and the French soldier was interrogated. He and his companions had simply brought their prisoners into the city that they might beg money for their ransom: two of the prisoners were Tuscan soldiers taken in Lunigiana; the other, an elderly man, was with a party of Genoese, with whom the French foragers had come to blows near Fivizzano. He might be mad, but he was harmless. The soldier knew no more, being unable to understand a word the old man said. Tito heard so far, but he was deaf to everything else till he was specially addressed. It was Tornabuoni who spoke.

“Will you go back with us, Melema? Or, since Messere is going off to Signa now, will you wisely follow the fashion of the times and go to hear the Frate, who will be like the torrent at its height this morning? It’s what we must all do, you know, if we are to save our Medicean skins. *I* should go if I had the leisure.”

Tito’s face had recovered its colour now, and he could make an effort to speak with gaiety.

“Of course I am among the admirers of the inspired orator,” he said, smilingly; “but, unfortunately, I shall be occupied with the Segretario till the time of the procession.”

“*I* am going into the Duomo to look at that savage old man again,” said Piero.



“Then have the charity to show him to one of the hospitals for travellers, Piero mio,” said Tornabuoni. “The monks may find out whether he wants putting into a cage.”

The party separated, and Tito took his way to the Palazzo Vecchio, where he was to find Bartolommeo Scala. It was not a long walk, but, for Tito, it was stretched out like the minutes of our morning dreams: the short spaces of street and piazza held memories, and previsions, and torturing fears, that might have made the history of months. He felt as if a serpent had begun to coil round his limbs. Baldassarre living, and in Florence, was a living revenge, which would no more rest than a winding serpent would rest until it had crushed its prey. It was not in the nature of that man to let an injury pass unavenged: his love and his hatred were of that passionate fervour which subjugates all the rest of the being, and makes a man sacrifice himself to his passion as if it were a deity to be worshipped with self-destruction. Baldassarre had relaxed his hold, and had disappeared. Tito knew well how to interpret that: it meant that the vengeance was to be studied that it might be sure. If he had not uttered those decisive words—“He is a madman”—if he could have summoned up the state of mind, the courage, necessary for avowing his recognition of Baldassarre, would not the risk have been less? He might have declared himself to have had what he believed to be

positive evidence of Baldassarre's death; and the only persons who could ever have had positive knowledge to contradict him, were Fra Luca, who was dead, and the crew of the companion galley, who had brought him the news of the encounter with the pirates. The chances were infinite against Baldassarre's having met again with any one of that crew, and Tito thought with bitterness that a timely, well-devised falsehood might have saved him from any fatal consequences. But to have told that falsehood would have required perfect self-command in the moment of a convulsive shock: he seemed to have spoken without any preconception—the words had leaped forth like a sudden birth that has been begotten and nourished in the darkness.

Tito was experiencing that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character.

There was but one chance for him now: the chance of Baldassarre's failure in finding his revenge. And—Tito grasped at a thought more actively cruel than any he had ever encouraged before: might not his own unpremeditated words have some truth in them?—enough truth, at least, to bear him out in his denial of any declaration Baldassarre might make about him? The old man looked strange and wild; with his eager heart and brain, suffering was likely enough to have produced madness. If it were so,

the vengeance that strove to inflict disgrace might be baffled.

But there was another form of vengeance not to be baffled by ingenious lying. Baldassarre belonged to a race to whom the thrust of the dagger seems almost as natural an impulse as the outleap of the tiger's talons. Tito shrank with shuddering dread from disgrace; but he had also that physical dread which is inseparable from a soft pleasure-loving nature, and which prevents a man from meeting wounds and death as a welcome relief from disgrace. His thoughts flew at once to some hidden defensive armour that might save him from a vengeance which no subtlety could parry.

He wondered at the power of the passionate fear that possessed him. It was as if he had been smitten with a blighting disease that had suddenly turned the joyous sense of young life into pain.

There was still one resource open to Tito. He might have turned back, sought Baldassarre again, confessed everything to him—to Romola—to all the world. But he never thought of that. The repentance which cuts off all moorings to evil, demands something more than selfish fear. He had no sense that there was strength and safety in truth; the only strength he trusted to lay in his ingenuity and his dissimulation. Now that the first shock, which had called up the traitorous signs of fear, was well past,

he hoped to be prepared for all emergencies by cool deceit—and defensive armour.

It was a characteristic fact in Tito's experience at this crisis, that no direct measures for ridding himself of Baldassarre ever occurred to him. All other possibilities passed through his mind, even to his own flight from Florence; but he never thought of any scheme for removing his enemy. His dread generated no active malignity, and he would still have been glad not to give pain to any mortal. He had simply chosen to make life easy to himself—to carry his human lot, if possible, in such a way that it should pinch him nowhere; and the choice had, at various times, landed him in unexpected positions. The question now was, not whether he should divide the common pressure of destiny with his suffering fellow-men; it was whether all the resources of lying would save him from being crushed by the consequences of that habitual choice.

## CHAPTER IV.

## INSIDE THE DUOMO.

WHEN Baldassarre, with his hands bound together, and the rope round his neck and body, pushed his way behind the curtain, and saw the interior of the Duomo before him, he gave a start of astonishment, and stood still against the doorway. He had expected to see a vast nave empty of everything but lifeless emblems—side altars with candles unlit, dim pictures, pale and rigid statues—with perhaps a few worshippers in the distant choir following a monotonous chant. That was the ordinary aspect of churches to a man who never went into them with any religious purpose.

And he saw, instead, a vast multitude of warm, living faces, upturned in breathless silence towards the pulpit, at the angle between the nave and the choir. The multitude was of all ranks, from magistrates and dames of gentle nurture to coarsely clad artisans and country people. In the pulpit was a Dominican monk, with strong features and dark hair, preaching with the crucifix in his hand.

For the first few minutes Baldassarre noted nothing of his preaching. Silent as his entrance had been, some eyes near the doorway had been turned on him with surprise and suspicion. The rope indicated plainly enough that he was an escaped prisoner, but in that case the church was a sanctuary which he had a right to claim; his advanced years and look of wild misery were fitted to excite pity rather than alarm; and as he stood motionless, with eyes that soon wandered absently from the wide scene before him to the pavement at his feet, those who had observed his entrance presently ceased to regard him, and became absorbed again in the stronger interest of listening to the sermon.

Among the eyes that had been turned towards him were Romola's: she had entered late through one of the side doors, and was so placed that she had a full view of the main entrance. She had looked long and attentively at Baldassarre, for grey hairs made a peculiar appeal to her, and the stamp of some unwonted suffering in the face, confirmed by the cord round the neck, stirred in her those sensibilities towards the sorrows of age, which her whole life had tended to develop. She fancied that his eyes had met hers in their first wandering gaze; but Baldassarre had not, in reality, noted her; he had only had a startled consciousness of the general scene, and the consciousness was a mere flash that made no perceptible break in the fierce tumult of

emotion which the encounter with Tito had created. Images from the past kept urging themselves upon him like delirious visions strangely blended with thirst and anguish. No distinct thought for the future could shape itself in the midst of that fiery passion: the nearest approach to such thought was the bitter sense of enfeebled powers, and a vague determination to universal distrust and suspicion. Suddenly he felt himself vibrating to loud tones, which seemed like the thundering echo of his own passion. A voice that penetrated his very marrow with its accent of triumphant certitude was saying—  
“The day of vengeance is at hand!”

Baldassarre quivered and looked up. He was too distant to see more than the general aspect of the preacher standing, with his right arm outstretched, lifting up the crucifix; but he panted for the threatening voice again as if it had been a promise of bliss. There was a pause before the preacher spoke again. He gradually lowered his arm. He deposited the crucifix on the edge of the pulpit, and crossed his arms over his breast, looking round at the multitude as if he would meet the glance of every individual face.

“All ye in Florence are my witnesses, for I spoke not in a corner. Ye are my witnesses, that four years ago, when there were yet no signs of war and tribulation, I preached the coming of the scourge. I lifted up my voice as a trumpet to the prelates and

princes and people of Italy and said, The cup of your iniquity is full. Behold, the thunder of the Lord is gathering, and it shall fall and break the cup, and your iniquity, which seems to you as pleasant wine, shall be poured out upon you, and shall be as molten lead. And you, O priests, who say, Ha, ha! there is no Presence in the sanctuary—the Shechinah is nought—the Mercy-seat is bare: we may sin behind the veil, and who shall punish us? To you, I said, the presence of God shall be revealed in his temple as a consuming fire, and your sacred garments shall become a winding-sheet of flame, and for sweet music there shall be shrieks and hissing, and for soft couches there shall be thorns, and for the breath of wantons shall come the pestilence. Trust not in your gold and silver, trust not in your high fortresses; for, though the walls were of iron, and the fortresses of adamant, the Most High shall put terror into your hearts and weakness into your councils, so that you shall be confounded and flee like women. He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and put others in their stead. For God will no longer endure the pollution of his sanctuary; he will thoroughly purge his Church.

“And forasmuch as it is written that God will do nothing but he revealeth it to his servants the prophets, he has chosen me, his unworthy servant, and made his purpose present to my soul in the living word of the Scriptures, and in the deeds



of His Providence; and by the ministry of angels he has revealed it to me in visions. And His word possesses me so that I am but as the branch of the forest when the wind of heaven penetrates it, and it is not in me to keep silence, even though I may be a derision to the scorner. And for four years I have preached in obedience to the Divine will: in the face of scoffing I have preached three things, which the Lord has delivered to me: that in these times God will regenerate His Church, and that before the regeneration must come the scourge over all Italy, and that these things will come quickly.

But hypocrites who cloak their hatred of the truth with a show of love have said to me, 'Come now, Frate, leave your prophesyings: it is enough to teach virtue.' To these I answer: 'Yes, you say in your hearts, God lives afar off, and his word is as a parchment written by dead men, and he deals not as in the days of old, rebuking the nations, and punishing the oppressors, and smiting the unholy priests as he smote the sons of Eli. But I cry again in your ears: God is near and not afar off; His judgments change not. He is the God of armies; the strong men who go up to battle are his ministers, even as the storm, and fire, and pestilence. He drives them by the breath of His angels, and they come upon the chosen land which has forsaken the covenant. And thou, O Italy, art the chosen land; has not God placed

his sanctuary within thee, and thou hast polluted it? Behold! the ministers of his wrath are upon thee—they are at thy very doors.”

Savonarola's voice had been rising in impassioned force up to this point, when he became suddenly silent, let his hands fall, and clasped them quietly before him. His silence, instead of being the signal for small movements amongst his audience, seemed to be as strong a spell to them as his voice. Through the vast area of the cathedral men and women sat with faces upturned, like breathing statues, till the voice was heard again in clear low tones.

“Yet there is a pause—even as in the days when Jerusalem was destroyed there was a pause that the children of God might flee from it. There is a stillness before the storm: lo, there is blackness above, but not a leaf quakes: the winds are stayed, that the voice of God's warning may be heard. Hear it now, O Florence, chosen city in the chosen land! Repent and forsake evil: do justice: love mercy: put away all uncleanness from among you, that the spirit of truth and holiness may fill your souls and breathe through all your streets and habitations, and then the pestilence shall not enter, and the sword shall pass over you and leave you unhurt.

“For the sword is hanging from the sky; it is quivering; it is about to fall! The sword of God upon the earth, swift and sudden! Did I not tell you, years ago, that I had beheld the vision and heard the voice?

And behold, it is fulfilled! Is there not a king with his army at your gates? Does not the earth shake with the tread of horses and the wheels of swift cannon? Is there not a fierce multitude that can lay bare the land as with a sharp razor? I tell you the French king with his army is the minister of God: God shall guide him as the hand guides a sharp sickle, and the joints of the wicked shall melt before him, and they shall be mown down as stubble: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. And the tyrants who make to themselves a throne out of the vices of the multitude, and the unbelieving priests who traffic in the souls of men and fill the very sanctuary with fornication, shall be hurled from their soft couches into burning hell; and the pagans and they who sinned under the old covenant shall stand aloof and say: 'Lo! these men have brought the stench of a new wickedness into the everlasting fire.'

"But thou, O Florence, take the offered mercy. See! the Cross is held out to you: come and be healed. Which among the nations of Italy has had a token like unto yours? The tyrant is driven out from among you: the men who held a bribe in their left hand and a rod in their right are gone forth, and no blood has been spilled. And now put away every other abomination from among you, and you shall be strong in the strength of the living God. Wash

yourselves from the black pitch of your vices, which have made you even as the heathens : put away the envy and hatred that have made your city as a nest of wolves. And there shall no harm happen to you : and the passage of armies shall be to you as the flight of birds, and rebellious Pisa shall be given to you again, and famine and pestilence shall be far from your gates, and you shall be as a beacon among the nations. But, mark ! while you suffer the accursed thing to lie in the camp you shall be afflicted and tormented, even though a remnant among you may be saved.”

These admonitions and promises had been spoken in an incisive tone of authority ; but in the next sentence the preacher’s voice melted into a strain of entreaty.

“ Listen, O people, over whom my heart yearns, as the heart of a mother over the children she has travailed for ! God is my witness that but for your sakes I would willingly live as a turtle in the depths of the forest, singing low to my Beloved, who is mine and I am His. For you I toil, for you I languish, for you my nights are spent in watching, and my soul melteth away for very heaviness. O Lord, thou knowest I am willing—I am ready. Take me, stretch me on thy cross : let the wicked who delight in blood, and rob the poor, and defile the temple of their bodies, and harden themselves against thy mercy—let them wag their heads and shoot out the

lip at me : let the thorns press upon my brow, and let my sweat be anguish—I desire to be made like Thee in thy great love. But let me see of the fruit of my travail—let this people be saved! Let me see them clothed in purity: let me hear their voices rise in concord as the voices of the angels: let them see no wisdom but in thy eternal law, no beauty but in holiness. Then they shall lead the way before the nations, and the people from the four winds shall follow them, and be gathered into the fold of the blessed. For it is thy will, O God, that the earth shall be converted unto thy law: it is thy will that wickedness shall cease and love shall reign. Come, O blessed promise! and behold, I am willing—lay me on the altar: let my blood flow and the fire consume me; but let my witness be remembered among men, that iniquity shall not prosper for ever.”

During the last appeal, Savonarola had stretched out his arms and lifted up his eyes to heaven; his strong voice had alternately trembled with emotion and risen again in renewed energy; but the passion with which he offered himself as a victim became at last too strong to allow of further speech, and he ended in a sob. Every changing tone, vibrating through the audience, shook them into answering emotion. There were plenty among them who had very moderate faith in the Frate's prophetic mission, and who in their cooler moments loved him little; nevertheless, they too were carried along by the

great wave of feeling which gathered its force from sympathies that lay deeper than all theory. A loud responding sob rose at once from the wide multitude, while Savonarola had fallen on his knees and buried his face in his mantle. He felt in that moment the rapture and glory of martyrdom without its agony.

In that great sob of the multitude Baldassarre's had mingled. Among all the human beings present, there was perhaps not one whose frame vibrated more strongly than his to the tones and words of the preacher; but it had vibrated like a harp of which all the strings had been wrenched away except one. That threat of a fiery inexorable vengeance—of a future into which the hated sinner might be pursued and held by the avenger in an eternal grapple, had come to him like the promise of an unquenchable fountain to unquenchable thirst. The doctrines of the sages, the old contempt for priestly superstitions, had fallen away from his soul like a forgotten language: if he could have remembered them, what answer could they have given to his great need like the answer given by this voice of energetic conviction? The thunder of denunciation fell on his passion-wrought nerves with all the force of self-evidence: his thought never went beyond it into questions—he was possessed by it as the war-horse is possessed by the clash of sounds. No word that was not a threat touched his consciousness; he had no fibre to be thrilled by it. But the fierce exultant delight to which

he was moved by the idea of perpetual vengeance found at once a climax and a relieving outburst in the preacher's words of self-sacrifice. To Baldassarre those words only brought the vague triumphant sense that he too was devoting himself—signing with his own blood the deed by which he gave himself over to an unending fire, that would seem but coolness to his burning hatred.

“I rescued him—I cherished him—if I might clutch his heart-strings for ever! Come, O blessed promise! Let my blood flow; let the fire consume me!”

The one chord vibrated to its utmost. Baldassarre clutched his own palms, driving his long nails into them, and burst into a sob with the rest.

## CHAPTER V.

## OUTSIDE THE DUOMO.

WHILE Baldassarre was possessed by the voice of Savonarola, he had not noticed that another man had entered through the doorway behind him, and stood not far off, observing him. It was Piero di Cosimo, who took no heed of the preaching, having come solely to look at the escaped prisoner. During the pause, in which the preacher and his audience had given themselves up to inarticulate emotion, the new comer advanced and touched Baldassarre on the arm. He looked round with the tears still slowly rolling down his face, but with a vigorous sigh, as if he had done with that outburst. The painter spoke to him in a low tone :—

“ Shall I cut your cords for you? I have heard how you were made prisoner.”

Baldassarre did not reply immediately; he glanced suspiciously at the officious stranger. At last he said, “ If you will.”

“ Better come outside,” said Piero.



Baldassarre again looked at him suspiciously; and Piero, partly guessing his thought, smiled, took out a knife, and cut the cords. He began to think that the idea of the prisoner's madness was not improbable, there was something so peculiar in the expression of his face. "Well," he thought, "if he does any mischief, he'll soon get tied up again. The poor devil shall have a chance, at least."

"You are afraid of me," he said again, in an undertone; "you don't want to tell me anything about yourself."

Baldassarre was folding his arms in enjoyment of that long-absent muscular sensation. He answered Piero with a less suspicious look and a tone which had some quiet decision in it.

"No, I have nothing to tell."

"As you please," said Piero, "but perhaps you want shelter, and may not know how hospitable we Florentines are to visitors with torn doublets and empty stomachs. There's an hospital for poor travellers outside all our gates, and, if you liked, I could put you in the way to one. There's no danger from your French soldier. He has been sent off."

Baldassarre nodded, and turned in silent acceptance of the offer, and he and Piero left the church together.

"You wouldn't like to sit to me for your portrait, should you?" said Piero, as they went along the Via dell' Orinolo, on the way to the gate of Santa Croce.

“I am a painter: I would give you money to get your portrait.”

The suspicion returned into Baldassarre's glance, as he looked at Piero, and said decidedly, “No.”

“Ah!” said the painter, curtly. “Well, go straight on, and you'll find the Porta Santa Croce, and outside it there's an hospital for travellers. So you'll not accept any service from me?”

“I give you thanks for what you have done already. I need no more.”

“It is well,” said Piero, with a shrug, and they turned away from each other.

“A mysterious old tiger!” thought the artist, “well worth painting. Ugly—with deep lines—looking as if the plough and the harrow had gone over his heart. A fine contrast to my bland and smiling Messer Greco—my *Bacco trionfante*, who has married the fair Antigone in contradiction to all history and fitness. Aha! his scholar's blood curdled uncomfortably at the old fellow's clutch.”

When Piero re-entered the Piazza del Duomo the multitude who had been listening to Fra Girolamo were pouring out from all the doors, and the haste they made to go on their several ways was a proof how important they held the preaching which had detained them from the other occupations of the day. The artist leaned against an angle of the Baptistery and watched the departing crowd, delighting in the variety of the garb and of the keen characteristic

faces—faces such as Masaccio had painted more than fifty years before: such as Domenico Ghirlandajo had not yet quite left off painting.

This morning was a peculiar occasion, and the Frate's audience, always multifarious, had represented even more completely than usual the various classes and political parties of Florence. There were men of high birth, accustomed to public charges at home and abroad, who had become newly conspicuous not only as enemies of the Medici and friends of popular government, but as thorough Piagnoni, espousing to the utmost the doctrines and practical teaching of the Frate, and frequenting San Marco as the seat of another Samuel; some of them men of authoritative and handsome presence, like Francesco Valori, and perhaps also of a hot and arrogant temper, very much gratified by an immediate divine authority for bringing about freedom in their own way; others, like Soderini, with less of the ardent Piagnone, and more of the wise politician. There were men, also of family, like Piero Capponi—simply brave undoctrinal lovers of a sober republican liberty, who preferred fighting to arguing, and had no particular reasons for thinking any ideas false that kept out the Medici and made room for public spirit. At their elbows were doctors of law whose studies of Accursius and his brethren had not so entirely consumed their ardour as to prevent them from becoming enthusiastic Piagnoni: Messer Luca Corsini himself,

for example, who on a memorable occasion yet to come was to raise his learned arms in street stone-throwing for the cause of religion, freedom, and the Frate. And among these dignities who carried their black lucco or furred mantle with an air of habitual authority, there was an abundant sprinkling of men with more contemplative and sensitive faces; scholars inheriting such high names as Strozzi and Acciajoli, who were already minded to take the cowl and join the community of San Marco; artists, wrought to a new and higher ambition by the teaching of Savonarola, like that young painter who had lately surpassed himself in his fresco of the Divine child on the wall of the Frate's bare cell—unconscious yet that he would one day himself wear the tonsure and the cowl, and be called Fra Bartolommeo. There was the mystic poet Girolamo Benevieni hastening, perhaps, to carry tidings of the beloved Frate's speedy coming to his friend Pico della Mirandola, who was never to see the light of another morning. There were well-born women attired with such scrupulous plainness that their more refined grace was the chief distinction between them and their less aristocratic sisters. There was a predominant proportion of the genuine *popolani* or middle class, belonging both to the Major and Minor Arts, conscious of purses threatened by war-taxes. And more striking and various, perhaps, than all the other classes of the Frate's disciples, there was the long stream of poorer

tradesmen and artisans, whose faith and hope in his Divine message varied from the rude indiscriminating trust in him as the friend of the poor and the enemy of the luxurious oppressive rich, to that eager tasting of all the subtleties of biblical interpretation which takes a peculiarly strong hold on the sedentary artisan, illuminating the long dim spaces beyond the board where he stitches, with a pale flame that seems to him the light of Divine science.

But among these various disciples of the Frate were scattered many who were not in the least his disciples. Some were Mediceans who had already, from motives of fear and policy, begun to show the presiding spirit of the popular party a feigned deference. Others were sincere advocates of a free government, but regarded Savonarola simply as an ambitious monk—half sagacious, half fanatical—who had made himself a powerful instrument with the people, and must be accepted as an important social fact. There were even some of his bitter enemies: members of the old aristocratic anti-Medicean party—determined to try and get the reins once more tight in the hands of certain chief families; or else licentious young men, who detested him as the kill-joy of Florence. For the sermons in the Duomo had already become political incidents, attracting the ears of curiosity and malice, as well as of faith. The men of ideas, like young Niccolò Macchiavelli, went to observe and write reports to friends away in country

villas; the men of appetites, like Dolfo Spini, bent on hunting down the Frate as a public nuisance who made game scarce, went to feed their hatred and lie in wait for grounds of accusation.

Perhaps, while no preacher ever had a more massive influence than Savonarola, no preacher ever had more heterogeneous materials to work upon. And one secret of the massive influence lay in the highly mixed character of his preaching. Baldassarre, wrought into an ecstasy of self-martyring revenge, was only an extreme case among the partial and narrow sympathies of that audience. In Savonarola's preaching there were strains that appealed to the very finest susceptibilities of men's natures, and there were elements that gratified low egoism, tickled gossiping curiosity, and fascinated timorous superstition. His need of personal predominance, his labyrinthine allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures, his enigmatic visions, and his false certitude about the Divine intentions, never ceased, in his own large soul, to be ennobled by that fervid piety, that passionate sense of the infinite, that active sympathy, that clear-sighted demand for the subjection of selfish interests to the general good, which he had in common with the greatest of mankind. But for the mass of his audience all the pregnancy of his preaching lay in his strong assertion of supernatural claims, in his denunciatory visions, in the false certitude which gave his sermons the interest of a political bulletin; and

having once held that audience in his mastery, it was necessary to his nature—it was necessary for their welfare—that he should *keep* the mastery. The effect was inevitable. No man ever struggled to retain power over a mixed multitude without suffering vitiation: his standard must be their lower needs, and not his own best insight.

The mysteries of human character have seldom been presented in a way more fitted to check the judgments of facile knowingness than in Girolamo Savonarola; but we can give him a reverence that needs no shutting of the eyes to fact, if we regard his life as a drama in which there were great inward modifications accompanying the outward changes. And up to this period, when his more direct action on political affairs had only just begun, it is probable that his imperious need of ascendancy had burned undiscernibly in the strong flame of his zeal for God and man.

It was the fashion of old, when an ox was led out for sacrifice to Jupiter, to chalk the dark spots, and give the offering a false show of unblemished whiteness. Let us fling away the chalk, and boldly say,—the victim is spotted, but it is not therefore in vain that his mighty heart is laid on the altar of men's highest hopes.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE GARMENT OF FEAR.

AT six o'clock that evening most people in Florence were glad the entrance of the new Charlemagne was fairly over. Doubtless when the roll of drums, the blast of trumpets, and the tramp of horses along the Pisan road began to mingle with the pealing of the excited bells, it was a grand moment for those who were stationed on turreted roofs, and could see the long-winding terrible pomp on the back-ground of the green hills and valley. There was no sunshine to light up the splendour of banners, and spears, and plumes, and silken surcoats, but there was no thick cloud of dust to hide it, and as the picked troops advanced into close view they could be seen all the more distinctly for the absence of dancing glitter. Tall and tough Scotch archers, Swiss halberdiers fierce and ponderous, nimble Gascons ready to wheel and climb, cavalry in which each man looked like a knight-errant with his indomitable spear and charger—it was satisfactory to be assured that they would



injure nobody but the enemies of God! With that confidence at heart it was a less dubious pleasure to look at the array of strength and splendour in nobles and knights, and youthful pages of choice lineage—at the bossed and jewelled sword-hilts, at the satin scarfs embroidered with strange symbolical devices of pious or gallant meaning, at the gold chains and jewelled aigrettes, at the gorgeous horse-trappings and brocaded mantles, and at the transcendent canopy carried by select youths above the head of the Most Christian King. To sum up with an old diarist, whose spelling and diction halted a little behind the wonders of this royal visit,—“*fù gran magnificenza.*”

But for the Signoria, who had been waiting on their platform against the gates, and had to march out at the right moment, with their orator in front of them, to meet the mighty guest, the grandeur of the scene had been somewhat screened by unpleasant sensations. If Messer Luca Corsini could have had a brief Latin welcome depending from his mouth in legible characters, it would have been less confusing when the rain came on, and created an impatience in men and horses that broke off the delivery of his well-studied periods, and reduced the representatives of the scholarly city to offer a make-shift welcome in impromptu French. But that sudden confusion had created a great opportunity for Tito. As one of the secretaries he was among the officials who were stationed behind the Signoria, and with whom these

highest dignities were promiscuously thrown when pressed upon by the horses.

“Somebody step forward and say a few words in French,” said Soderini. But no one of high importance chose to risk a second failure. “You, Francesco Gaddi—you can speak.” But Gaddi, distrusting his own promptness, hung back, and pushing Tito, said, “You, Melema.”

Tito stepped forward in an instant, and, with the air of profound deference that came as naturally to him as walking, said the few needful words in the name of the Signoria; then gave way gracefully, and let the king pass on. His presence of mind, which had failed him in the terrible crisis of the morning, had been a ready instrument this time. It was an excellent livery servant that never forsook him when danger was not visible. But when he was complimented on his opportune service, he laughed it off as a thing of no moment, and to those who had not witnessed it, let Gaddi have the credit of the improvised welcome. No wonder Tito was popular: the touchstone by which men try us is most often their own vanity.

Other things besides the oratorical welcome had turned out rather worse than had been expected. If everything had happened according to ingenious pre-conceptions, the Florentine procession of clergy and laity would not have found their way choked up and been obliged to take a make-shift course through the

back streets, so as to meet the king at the Cathedral only. Also, if the young monarch under the canopy, seated on his charger with his lance upon his thigh, had looked more like a Charlemagne and less like a hastily modelled grotesque, the imagination of his admirers would have been much assisted. It might have been wished that the scourge of Italian wickedness and "Champion of the honour of women" had had a less miserable leg, and only the normal sum of toes; that his mouth had been of a less reptilian width of slit, his nose and head of a less exorbitant outline. But the thin leg rested on cloth of gold and pearls, and the face was only an interruption of a few square inches in the midst of black velvet and gold, and the blaze of rubies, and the brilliant tints of the embroidered and bepearled canopy,—"*fù gran magnificenza.*"

And the people had cried *Francia, Francia!* with an enthusiasm proportioned to the splendour of the canopy which they had torn to pieces as their spoil, according to immemorial custom; royal lips had duly kissed the altar; and after all mischances the royal person and retinue were lodged in the Palace of the Via Larga, the rest of the nobles and gentry were dispersed among the great houses of Florence, and the terrible soldiery were encamped in the Prato and other open quarters. The business of the day was ended.

But the streets still presented a surprising aspect,

such as Florentines had not seen before under the November stars. Instead of a gloom unbroken except by a lamp burning feebly here and there before a saintly image at the street corners, or by a stream of redder light from an open doorway, there were lamps suspended at the windows of all houses, so that men could walk along no less securely and commodiously than by day,—“*fù gran magnificenza.*”

Along those illuminated streets Tito Melema was walking at about eight o'clock in the evening, on his way homeward. He had been exerting himself throughout the day under the pressure of hidden anxieties, and had at last made his escape unnoticed from the midst of after-supper gaiety. Once at leisure thoroughly to face and consider his circumstances, he hoped that he could so adjust himself to them and to all probabilities as to get rid of his childish fear. If he had only not been wanting in the presence of mind necessary to recognize Baldassarre under that surprise!—it would have been happier for him on all accounts; for he still winced under the sense that he was deliberately inflicting suffering on his father: he would very much have preferred that Baldassarre should be prosperous and happy. But he had left himself no second path now: there could be no conflict any longer: the only thing he had to do was to take care of himself.

While these thoughts were in his mind he was

advancing from the Piazza di Santa Croce along the Via dei Benci, and as he neared the angle turning into the Borgo Santa Croce his ear was struck by a music which was not that of evening revelry, but of vigorous labour—the music of the anvil. Tito gave a slight start and quickened his pace, for the sounds had suggested a welcome thought. He knew that they came from the workshop of Niccolò Caparra, famous resort of all Florentines who cared for curious and beautiful iron-work.

“What makes the giant at work so late?” thought Tito. “But so much the better for me. I can do that little bit of business to-night instead of to-morrow morning.”

Preoccupied as he was, he could not help pausing a moment in admiration as he came in front of the workshop. The wide doorway, standing at the truncated angle of a great block or “isle” of houses, was surmounted by a loggia roofed with fluted tiles, and supported by stone columns with roughly carved capitals. Against the red light framed in by the outline of the fluted tiles and columns stood in black relief the grand figure of Niccolò, with his huge arms in rhythmic rise and fall, first hiding and then disclosing the profile of his firm mouth and powerful brow. Two slighter ebony figures, one at the anvil, the other at the bellows, served to set off his superior massiveness.

Tito darkened the doorway with a very different

outline, standing in silence, since it was useless to speak until Niccolò should deign to pause and notice him. That was not until the smith had beaten the head of an axe to the due sharpness of edge and dismissed it from his anvil. But in the meantime Tito had satisfied himself by a glance round the shop that the object of which he was in search had not disappeared.

Niccolò gave an unceremonious but good-humoured nod as he turned from the anvil and rested his hammer on his hip.

“What is it, Messer Tito? Business?”

“Assuredly, Niccolò; else I should not have ventured to interrupt you when you are working out of hours, since I take that as a sign that your work is pressing.”

“I’ve been at the same work all day—making axes and spear-heads. And every fool that has passed my shop has put his pumpkin-head in to say, ‘Niccolò, wilt thou not come and see the King of France and his soldiers?’ and I’ve answered, ‘No: I don’t want to see their faces—I want to see their backs.’”

“Are you making arms for the citizens, then, Niccolò, that they may have something better than rusty scythes and spits in case of an uproar?”

“We shall see. Arms are good, and Florence is likely to want them. The Frate tells us we shall get Pisa again, and I hold with the Frate; but I

should be glad to know how the promise is to be fulfilled, if we don't get plenty of good weapons forged? The Frate sees a long way before him; that I believe. But he doesn't see birds caught with winking at them, as some of our people try to make out. He sees sense, and not nonsense. But you're a bit of a Medicean, Messer Tito Melema. Ebbene! so I've been myself in my time, before the cask began to run sour. What's your business?"

"Simply to know the price of that fine coat of mail I saw hanging up here the other day. I want to buy it for a certain personage who needs a protection of that sort under his doublet."

"Let him come and buy it himself, then," said Niccolò, bluntly. "I'm rather nice about what I sell, and whom I sell to. I like to know who's my customer."

"I know your scruples, Niccolò. But that is only defensive armour: it can hurt nobody."

"True: but it may make the man who wears it feel himself all the safer if he should want to hurt somebody. No, no: it's not my own work; but it's fine work of Maso of Brescia; I should be loth for it to cover the heart of a scoundrel. I must know who is to wear it."

"Well, then, to be plain with you, Niccolò mio, I want it myself," said Tito, knowing it was useless to try persuasion. "The fact is, I am likely to have a journey to take—and you know what journeying is

in these times. You don't suspect *me* of treason against the Republic?"

"No, I know no harm of you," said Niccolò, in his blunt way again. "But have you the money to pay for the coat? For you've passed my shop often enough to know my sign: you've seen the burning account-books. I trust nobody. The price is twenty florins, and that's because it's second-hand. You're not likely to have so much money with you. Let it be till to-morrow."

"I happen to have the money," said Tito, who had been winning at play the day before, and had not emptied his purse. "I'll carry the armour home with me."

Niccolò reached down the finely wrought coat, which fell together into little more than two handfuls.

"There, then," he said, when the florins had been told down on his palm. "Take the coat. It's made to cheat sword, or poniard, or arrow. But, for my part, I would never put such a thing on. It's like carrying fear about with one."

Niccolò's words had an unpleasant intensity of meaning for Tito. But he smiled and said,—

"Ah, Niccolò, we scholars are all cowards. Handling the pen doesn't thicken the arm as your hammer-wielding does. Addio!"

He folded the armour under his mantle, and hastened across the Ponte Rubaconte.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE YOUNG WIFE.

WHILE Tito was hastening across the bridge with the new-bought armour under his mantle, Romola was pacing up and down the old library, thinking of him and longing for his return.

It was but a few fair faces that had not looked forth from windows that day to see the entrance of the French king and his nobles. One of the few was Romola's. She had been present at no festivities since her father had died—died quite suddenly in his chair, three months before.

“Is not Tito coming to write?” he had said, when the bell had long ago sounded the usual hour in the evening. He had not asked before, from dread of a negative; but Romola had seen by his listening face and restless movements that nothing else was in his mind.

“No, father, he had to go to a supper at the cardinal's: you know he is wanted so much by every one,” she answered, in a tone of gentle excuse.

“Ah! then perhaps he will bring some positive

word about the library; the cardinal promised last week," said Bardo, apparently pacified by this hope.

He was silent a little while; then, suddenly flushing, he said,—

"I must go on without him, Romola. Get the pen. He has brought me no new text to comment on; but I must say what I want to say about the New Platonists. I shall die and nothing will have been done. Make haste, my Romola."

"I am ready, father," she said, the next minute, holding the pen in her hand.

But there was silence. Romola took no note of this for a little while, accustomed to pauses in dictation; and when at last she looked round inquiringly, there was no change of attitude.

"I am quite ready, father!"

Still Bardo was silent, and his silence was never again broken.

Romola looked back on that hour with some indignation against herself, because even with the first outburst of her sorrow there had mingled the irrepressible thought, "Perhaps my life with Tito will be more perfect now."

For the dream of a triple life with an undivided sum of happiness had not been quite fulfilled. The rainbow-tinted shower of sweets, to have been perfectly typical, should have had some invisible seeds of bitterness mingled with them; the crowned Ariadne, under the snowing roses, had felt more and

more the presence of unexpected thorns. It was not Tito's fault, Romola had continually assured herself. He was still all gentleness to her, and to her father also. But it was in the nature of things—she saw it clearly now—it was in the nature of things that no one but herself could go on month after month, and year after year, fulfilling patiently all her father's monotonous exacting demands. Even she, whose sympathy with her father had made all the passion and religion of her young years, had not always been patient, had been inwardly very rebellious. It was true that before their marriage, and even for some time after, Tito had seemed more unwearying than herself; but then, of course, the effort had the ease of novelty. We assume a load with confident readiness, and up to a certain point the growing irksomeness of pressure is tolerable; but at last the desire for relief can no longer be resisted. Romola said to herself that she had been very foolish and ignorant in her girlish time: she was wiser now, and would make no unfair demands on the man to whom she had given her best woman's love and worship. The breath of sadness that still cleaved to her lot while she saw her father month after month sink from elation into new disappointment as Tito gave him less and less of his time, and made bland excuses for not continuing his own share of the joint work—that sadness was no fault of Tito's, she said, but rather of their inevitable destiny. If he stayed less and less with her, why,

that was because they could hardly ever be alone. His caresses were no less tender: if she pleaded timidly on any one evening that he should stay with her father instead of going to another engagement which was not peremptory, he excused himself with such charming gaiety, he seemed to linger about her with such fond playfulness before he could quit her, that she could only feel a little heartache in the midst of her love, and then go to her father and try to soften his vexation and disappointment, while inwardly her imagination was busy trying to see how Tito could be as good as she had thought he was, and yet find it impossible to sacrifice those pleasures of society which were necessarily more vivid to a bright creature like him than to the common run of men. She herself would have liked more gaiety, more admiration: it was true, she gave it up willingly for her father's sake—she would have given up much more than that for the sake even of a slight wish on Tito's part. It was clear that their natures differed widely; but perhaps it was no more than the inherent difference between man and woman, that made her affections more absorbing. If there were any other difference she tried to persuade herself that the inferiority was on her side. Tito was really kinder than she was, better tempered, less proud and resentful; he had no angry retorts, he met all complaints with perfect sweetness; he only escaped as quietly as he could from things that were unpleasant.

It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon. And Romola was urged to doubt herself the more by the necessity of interpreting her disappointment in her life with Tito, so as to satisfy at once her love and her pride. Disappointment? Yes, there was no other milder word that would tell the truth. Perhaps all women had to suffer the disappointment of ignorant hopes, if she only knew their experience. Still, there had been something peculiar in her lot: her relation to her father had claimed unusual sacrifices from her husband. Tito had once thought that his love would make those sacrifices easy; his love had not been great enough for that. She was not justified in resenting a self-delusion. No! resentment must not rise: all endurance seemed easy to Romola rather than a state of mind in which she would admit to herself that Tito acted unworthily. If she had felt a new heartache in the solitary hours with her father through the last months of his life, it had been by no inexcusable fault of her husband's; and now—it was a hope that would make its presence felt even in the first moments when her father's place was empty—there was no longer any importunate claim to divide her from Tito; their young lives would flow in one current, and their true marriage would begin.

But the sense of something like guilt towards her father in a hope that grew out of his death, gave all the more force to the anxiety with which she dwelt on the means of fulfilling his supreme wish. That piety towards his memory was all the atonement she could make now for a thought that seemed akin to joy at his loss. The laborious simple life, pure from vulgar corrupting ambitions, embittered by the frustration of the dearest hopes, imprisoned at last in total darkness—a long seed-time without a harvest—was at an end now, and all that remained of it besides the tablet in Santa Croce and the unfinished commentary on Tito's text, was the collection of manuscripts and antiquities, the fruit of half a century's toil and frugality. The fulfilment of her father's life-long ambition about this library was a sacramental obligation for Romola.

The precious relic was safe from creditors, for when the deficit towards their payment had been ascertained, Bernardo del Nero, though he was far from being among the wealthiest Florentines, had advanced the necessary sum of about a thousand florins—a large sum in those days—accepting a lien on the collection as a security.

“The State will repay me,” he had said to Romola, making light of the service, which had really cost him some inconvenience. “If the cardinal finds a building, as he seems to say he will, our

Signoria may consent to do the rest. I have no children, I can afford the risk."

But within the last ten days all hopes in the Medici had come to an end: and the famous Medicean collections in the Via Larga were themselves in danger of dispersion. French agents had already begun to see that such very fine antique gems as Lorenzo had collected belonged by right to the first nation in Europe; and the Florentine State, which had got possession of the Medicean library, was likely to be glad of a customer for it. With a war to recover Pisa hanging over it, and with the certainty of having to pay large subsidies to the French king, the State was likely to prefer money to manuscripts.

To Romola these grave political changes had gathered their chief interest from their bearing on the fulfilment of her father's wish. She had been brought up in learned seclusion from the interests of actual life, and had been accustomed to think of heroic deeds and great principles as something antithetic to the vulgar present, of the Pnyx and the Forum as something more worthy of attention than the councils of living Florentine men. And now the expulsion of the Medici meant little more for her than the extinction of her best hope about her father's library. The times, she knew, were unpleasant for friends of the Medici, like her godfather and Tito: superstitious shopkeepers and the stupid rabble,

were full of suspicions ; but her new keen interest in public events, in the outbreak of war, in the issue of the French king's visit, in the changes that were likely to happen in the State, was kindled solely by the sense of love and duty to her father's memory. All Romola's ardour had been concentrated in her affections. Her share in her father's learned pursuits had been for her little more than a toil which was borne for his sake ; and Tito's airy brilliant faculty had no attraction for her that was not merged in the deeper sympathies that belong to young love and trust. Romola had had contact with no mind that could stir the larger possibilities of her nature ; they lay folded and crushed like embryonic wings, making no element in her consciousness beyond an occasional vague uneasiness.

But this new personal interest of hers in public affairs had made her care at last to understand precisely what influence Fra Girolamo's preaching was likely to have on the turn of events. Changes in the form of the State were talked of, and all she could learn from Tito, whose secretaryship and serviceable talents carried him into the heart of public business, made her only the more eager to fill out her lonely day by going to hear for herself what it was that was just now leading all Florence by the ears. This morning, for the first time, she had been to hear one of the Advent sermons in the Duomo. When Tito



had left her, she had formed a sudden resolution, and after visiting the spot where her father was buried in Santa Croce, had walked on to the Duomo. The memory of that last scene with Dino was still vivid within her whenever she recalled it, but it had receded behind the experience and anxieties of her married life. The new sensibilities and questions which it had half awakened in her were quieted again by that subjection to her husband's mind which is felt by every wife who loves her husband with passionate devotedness and full reliance. She remembered the effect of Fra Girolamo's voice and presence on her as a ground for expecting that his sermon might move her in spite of his being a narrow-minded monk. But the sermon did no more than slightly deepen her previous impression, that this fanatical preacher of tribulations was after all a man towards whom it might be possible for her to feel personal regard and reverence. The denunciations and exhortations simply arrested her attention. She felt no terror, no pangs of conscience: it was the roll of distant thunder, that seemed grand, but could not shake her. But when she heard Savonarola invoke martyrdom, she sobbed with the rest: she felt herself penetrated with a new sensation—a strange sympathy with something apart from all the definable interests of her life. It was not altogether unlike the thrill which had accompanied certain rare heroic touches in history and poetry; but the resemblance was as that between the memory of music,

and the sense of being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies.

But that transient emotion, strong as it was, seemed to lie quite outside the inner chamber and sanctuary of her life. She was not thinking of Fra Girolamo now ; she was listening anxiously for the step of her husband. During these three months of their double solitude she had thought of each day as an epoch in which their union might begin to be more perfect. She was conscious of being sometimes a little too sad or too urgent about what concerned her father's memory—a little too critical or coldly silent when Tito narrated the things that were said and done in the world he frequented—a little too hasty in suggesting that by living quite simply as her father had done, they might become rich enough to pay Bernardo del Nero, and reduce the difficulties about the library. It was not possible that Tito could feel so strongly on this last point as she did, and it was asking a great deal from him to give up luxuries for which he really laboured. The next time Tito came home she would be careful to suppress all those promptings that seemed to isolate her from him. Romola was labouring, as every loving woman must, to subdue her nature to her husband's. The great need of her heart compelled her to strangle, with desperate resolution, every rising impulse of suspicion, pride, and resentment ; she felt equal to any self-infliction that would save her from ceasing to love. That would have

been like the hideous nightmare in which the world had seemed to break away all round her, and leave her feet overhanging the darkness. Romola had never distinctly imagined such a future for herself; she was only beginning to feel the presence of effort in that clinging trust which had once been mere repose.

She waited and listened long, for Tito had not come straight home after leaving Niccolò Caparra, and it was more than two hours after the time when he was crossing the Ponte Rubaconte that Romola heard the great door of the court turning on its hinges, and hastened to the head of the stone steps. There was a lamp hanging over the stairs, and they could see each other distinctly as he ascended. The eighteen months had produced a more definable change in Romola's face than in Tito's: the expression was more subdued, less cold, and more beseeching, and, as the pink flush overspread her face now, in her joy that the long waiting was at an end, she was much lovelier than on the day when Tito had first seen her. On that day, any on-looker would have said that Romola's nature was made to command, and Tito's to bend; yet now Romola's mouth was quivering a little, and there was some timidity in her glance.

He made an effort to smile, as she said,

“My Tito, you are tired; it has been a fatiguing day: is it not true?”

Maso was there, and no more was said until they

had crossed the ante-chamber and closed the door of the library behind them. The wood was burning brightly on the great dogs; that was one welcome for Tito, late as he was, and Romola's gentle voice was another.

He just turned and kissed her, when she took off his mantle, then went towards a high-backed chair placed for him near the fire, threw himself into it, and flung away his cap, saying, not peevishly, but in a fatigued tone of remonstrance, as he gave a slight shudder,

“Romola, I wish you would give up sitting in this library. Surely our own rooms are pleasanter in this chill weather.”

Romola felt hurt. She had never seen Tito so indifferent in his manner; he was usually full of lively solicitous attention. And she had thought so much of his return to her after the long day's absence! He must be very weary.

“I wonder you have forgotten, Tito,” she answered, looking at him, anxiously, as if she wanted to read an excuse for him in the signs of bodily fatigue. “You know I am making the catalogue on the new plan that my father wished for; you have not time to help me, so I must work at it closely.”

Tito, instead of meeting Romola's glance, closed his eyes and rubbed his hands over his face and hair. He felt he was behaving unlike himself, but he would make amends to-morrow. The terrible resurrection

of secret fears, which, if Romola had known them, would have alienated her from him for ever, caused him to feel an alienation already begun between them—caused him to feel a certain repulsion towards a woman from whose mind he was in danger. The feeling had taken hold of him unawares, and he was vexed with himself for behaving in this new cold way to her. He could not suddenly command any affectionate looks or words; he could only exert himself to say what might serve as an excuse.

“I am not well, Romola; you must not be surprised if I am peevish.”

“Ah, you have had so much to tire you to-day,” said Romola, kneeling down close to him, and laying her arm on his chest while she put his hair back caressingly.

Suddenly she drew her arm away with a start, and a gaze of alarmed inquiry.

“What have you got under your tunic, Tito? Something as hard as iron.”

“It *is* iron—it is chain armour,” he said at once. He was prepared for the surprise and the question, and he spoke quietly, as of something that he was not hurried to explain.

“There was some unexpected danger to-day, then?” said Romola, in a tone of conjecture. “You had it lent to you for the procession?”

“No; it is my own. I shall be obliged to wear it constantly, for some time.”

“What is it that threatens you, my Tito?” said Romola, looking terrified, and clinging to him again.

“Every one is threatened in these times, who is not a rabid enemy of the Medici. Don’t look distressed, my Romola—this armour will make me safe against covert attacks.”

Tito put his hand on her neck and smiled. This little dialogue about the armour had broken through the new crust, and made a channel for the sweet habit of kindness.

“But my godfather, then,” said Romola; “is not he, too, in danger? And he takes no precautions—ought he not? since he must surely be in more danger than you, who have so little influence compared with him.”

“It is just because I am less important that I am in more danger,” said Tito, readily. “I am suspected constantly of being an envoy. And men like Messer Bernardo are protected by their position and their extensive family connections, which spread among all parties, while I am a Greek that nobody would avenge.”

“But, Tito, is it a fear of some particular person, or only a vague sense of danger, that has made you think of wearing this?” Romola was unable to repel the idea of a degrading fear in Tito, which mingled itself with her anxiety.

“I have had special threats,” said Tito, “but I must beg you to be silent on the subject, my Romola.”

I shall consider that you have broken my confidence, if you mention it to your godfather."

"Assuredly I will not mention 'it," said Romola, blushing, "if you wish it to be a secret. But, dearest Tito," she added, after a moment's pause, in a tone of loving anxiety, "it will make you very wretched."

"What will make me wretched?" he said, with a scarcely perceptible movement across his face, as from some darting sensation.

"This fear—this heavy armour. I can't help shuddering as I feel it under my arm. I could fancy it a story of enchantment—that some malignant fiend had changed your sensitive human skin into a hard shell. It seems so unlike my bright, light-hearted Tito!"

"Then you would rather have your husband exposed to danger, when he leaves you?" said Tito, smiling. "If you don't mind my being poniarded or shot, why need I mind? I will give up the armour—shall I?"

"No, Tito, no. I am fanciful. Do not heed what I have said. But such crimes are surely not common in Florence? I have always heard my father and godfather say so. Have they become frequent lately?"

"It is not unlikely they will become frequent, with the bitter hatreds that are being bred continually."

Romola was silent a few moments. She shrank from insisting further on the subject of the armour. She tried to shake it off.

“Tell me what has happened to-day,” she said, in a cheerful tone. “Has all gone off well?”

“Excellently well. First of all, the rain came and put an end to Luca Corsini’s oration, which nobody wanted to hear, and a ready-tongued personage—some say it was Gaddi, some say it was Melema, but really it was done so quickly no one knows who it was—had the honour of giving the Cristianissimo the briefest possible welcome in bad French.”

“Tito, it was you, I know,” said Romola, smiling brightly, and kissing him. “How is it you never care about claiming anything? And after that?”

“Oh! after that, there was a show of armour and jewels, and trappings, such as you saw at the last Florentine *giostra*, only a great deal more of them. There was strutting, and prancing, and confusion, and scrambling, and the people shouted, and the Cristianissimo smiled from ear to ear. And after that there was a great deal of flattery, and eating, and play. I was at Tornabuoni’s. I will tell you about it to-morrow.”

“Yes, dearest, never mind now. But is there any more hope that things will end peaceably for Florence, that the Republic will not get into fresh troubles?”



Tito gave a shrug. "Florence will have no peace but what it pays well for; that is clear."

Romola's face saddened, but she checked herself, and said, cheerfully, "You would not guess where I went to-day, Tito. I went to the Duomo, to hear Fra Girolamo."

Tito looked startled; he had immediately thought of Baldassarre's entrance into the Duomo: but Romola gave his look another meaning.

"You are surprised, are you not? It was a sudden thought. I want to know all about the public affairs now, and I determined to hear for myself what the Frate promised the people about this French invasion."

"Well, and what did you think of the prophet?"

"He certainly has a very mysterious power, that man. A great deal of his sermon was what I expected; but once I was strangely moved—I sobbed with the rest."

"Take care, Romola," said Tito, playfully, feeling relieved that she had said nothing about Baldassarre; "you have a touch of fanaticism in you. I shall have you seeing visions, like your brother."

"No; it was the same with every one else. He carried them all with him; unless it were that gross Dolfo Spini, whom I saw there making grimaces. There was even a wretched-looking man, with a rope round his neck—an escaped prisoner, I should think, who had run in for shelter—a very wild-eyed

old man: I saw him with great tears rolling down his cheeks, as he looked and listened quite eagerly."

There was a slight pause before Tito spoke.

"I saw the man," he said, "the prisoner. I was outside the Duomo with Lorenzo Tornabuoni when he ran in. He had escaped from a French soldier. Did you see him when you came out?"

"No, he went out with our good old Piero di Cosimo. I saw Piero come in and cut off his rope, and take him out of the church. But you want rest, Tito? You feel ill?"

"Yes," said Tito, rising. The horrible sense that he must live in continual dread of what Baldassarre had said or done pressed upon him like a cold weight.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE PAINTED RECORD.

FOUR days later, Romola was on her way to the house of Piero di Cosimo, in the Via Gualfonda. Some of the streets through which she had to pass were lined with Frenchmen who were gazing at Florence, and with Florentines who were gazing at the French, and the gaze was not on either side entirely friendly and admiring. The first nation in Europe, of necessity finding itself, when out of its own country, in the presence of general inferiority, naturally assumed an air of conscious pre-eminence; and the Florentines, who had taken such pains to play the host amiably, were getting into the worst humour with their too superior guests.

For after the first smiling compliments and festivities were over—after wondrous Mysteries with unrivalled machinery of floating clouds and angels had been presented in churches—after the royal guest had honoured Florentine dames with much of his Most Christian ogling at balls and suppers, and business had begun to be talked of—it appeared that

the new Charlemagne regarded Florence as a conquered city, inasmuch as he had entered it with his lance in rest, talked of leaving his viceroy behind him, and had thoughts of bringing back the Medici. Singular logic this appeared to be on the part of an elect instrument of God! since the policy of Piero de' Medici, disowned by the people, had been the only offence of Florence against the majesty of France. And Florence was determined not to submit. The determination was being expressed very strongly in consultations of citizens inside the Old Palace, and it was beginning to show itself on the broad flags of the streets and piazze wherever there was an opportunity of flouting an insolent Frenchman. Under these circumstances the streets were not altogether a pleasant promenade for well-born women; but Romola, shrouded in her black veil and mantle, and with old Maso by her side, felt secure enough from impertinent observation.

And she was impatient to visit Piero di Cosimo. A copy of her father's portrait as *Œdipus*, which he had long ago undertaken to make for her, was not yet finished; and Piero was so uncertain in his work—sometimes, when the demand was not peremptory, laying aside a picture for months; sometimes thrusting it into a corner or coffer, where it was likely to be utterly forgotten—that she felt it necessary to watch over his progress. She was a favourite with the painter, and he was inclined to

fulfil any wish of hers, but no general inclination could be trusted as a safeguard against his sudden whims. He had told her the week before that the picture would perhaps be finished by this time; and Romola was nervously anxious to have in her possession a copy of the only portrait existing of her father in the days of his blindness, lest his image should grow dim in her mind. The sense of defect in her devotedness to him made her cling with all the force of compunction as well as affection to the duties of memory. Love does not aim simply at the conscious good of the beloved object: it is not satisfied without perfect loyalty of heart; it aims at its own completeness.

Romola, by special favour, was allowed to intrude upon the painter without previous notice. She lifted the iron slide and called Piero in a flute-like tone, as the little maiden with the eggs had done in Tito's presence. Piero was quick in answering, but when he opened the door he accounted for his quickness in a manner that was not complimentary.

"Ah, Madonna Romola, is it you? I thought my eggs were come; I wanted them."

"I have brought you something better than hard eggs, Piero. Maso has got a little basket full of cakes and *confetti* for you," said Romola, smiling, as she put back her veil. She took the basket from Maso, and, stepping into the house, said,—

“I know you like these things when you can have them without trouble. Confess you do.”

“Yes, when they come to me as easily as the light does,” said Piero, folding his arms and looking down at the sweetmeats as Romola uncovered them and glanced at him archly. “And they are come along with the light now,” he added, lifting his eyes to her face and hair with a painter’s admiration, as her hood, dragged by the weight of her veil, fell backward.

“But I know what the sweetmeats are for,” he went on; “they are to stop my mouth while you scold me. Well, go on into the next room, and you will see I’ve done something to the picture since you saw it, though it’s not finished yet. But I didn’t promise, you know: I take care not to promise:

‘Chi promette e non mantiene  
L’anima sua non va mai bene.’”

The door opening on the wild garden was closed now, and the painter was at work. Not at Romola’s picture, however. That was standing on the floor, propped against the wall, and Piero stooped to lift it, that he might carry it into the proper light. But in lifting away this picture, he had disclosed another—the oil-sketch of Tito, to which he had made an important addition within the last few days. It was so much smaller than the other picture that it stood far within it, and Piero, apt to forget where he had placed anything, was not aware of what he had

revealed as, peering at some detail in the painting which he held in his hands, he went to place it on an easel. But Romola exclaimed, flushing with astonishment,

“That is Tito!”

Piero looked round, and gave a silent shrug. He was vexed at his own forgetfulness.

She was still looking at the sketch in astonishment; but presently she turned towards the painter, and said with puzzled alarm,

“What a strange picture! When did you paint it? What does it mean?”

“A mere fancy of mine,” said Piero, lifting off his skull-cap, scratching his head, and making the usual grimace by which he avoided the betrayal of any feeling. “I wanted a handsome young face for it, and your husband’s was just the thing.”

He went forward, stooped down to the picture, and lifting it away with its back to Romola, pretended to be giving it a passing examination, before putting it aside as a thing not good enough to show.

But Romola, who had the fact of the armour in her mind, and was penetrated by this strange coincidence of things which associated Tito with the idea of fear, went to his elbow and said,—

“Don’t put it away; let me look again. That man with the rope round his neck—I saw him—I saw you come to him in the Duomo. What was it that made you put him into a picture with Tito?”

Piero saw no better resource than to tell part of the truth.

“It was a mere accident. The man was running away—running up the steps, and caught hold of your husband: I suppose he had stumbled. I happened to be there, and saw it, and I thought the savage-looking old fellow was a good subject. But it’s worth nothing—it’s only a freakish daub of mine,” Piero ended, contemptuously, moving the sketch away with an air of decision, and putting it on a high shelf. “Come and look at the *Œdipus*.”

He had shown a little too much anxiety in putting the sketch out of her sight, and had produced the very impression he had sought to prevent—that there was really something unpleasant, something disadvantageous to Tito, in the circumstances out of which the picture arose. But this impression silenced her: her pride and delicacy shrank from questioning further, where questions might seem to imply that she could entertain even a slight suspicion against her husband. She merely said, in as quiet a tone as she could,

“He was a strange piteous-looking man, that prisoner. Do you know anything more of him?”

“No more: I showed him the way to the hospital, that’s all. See now, the face of *Œdipus* is pretty nearly finished; tell me what you think of it.”

Romola now gave her whole attention to her father’s portrait, standing in long silence before it.



“Ah!” she said at last, “you have done what I wanted. You have given it more of the listening look. My good Piero”—she turned towards him with bright moist eyes—“I am very grateful to you.”

“Now, that’s what I can’t bear in you women,” said Piero, turning impatiently, and kicking aside the objects that littered the floor—“you are always pouring out feelings where there’s no call for them. Why should you be grateful to me for a picture you pay me for, especially when I make you wait for it? And if I paint a picture, I suppose it’s for my own pleasure and credit to paint it well, eh? Are you to thank a man for not being a rogue or a noodle? It’s enough if he himself thanks Messer Domeneddio, who has made him neither the one nor the other. But women think walls are held together with honey.”

“You crusty Piero! I forgot how snappish you are. Here, put this nice sweetmeat in your mouth,” said Romola, smiling through her tears, and taking something very crisp and sweet from the little basket.

Piero accepted it very much as that proverbial bear that dreams of pears might accept an exceedingly mellow “swan-egg”—really liking the gift, but accustomed to have his pleasures and pains concealed under a shaggy coat.

“It’s good, Madonna Antigone,” said Piero, putting his fingers in the basket for another. He

had eaten nothing but hard eggs for a fortnight. Romola stood opposite him, feeling her new anxiety suspended for a little while by the sight of this naïve enjoyment.

“Good-by, Piero,” she said, presently, setting down the basket. “I promise not to thank you if you finish the portrait soon and well. I will tell you, you were bound to do it for your own credit.”

“Good,” said Piero, curtly, helping her with much deftness to fold her mantle and veil round her.

“I’m glad she asked no more questions about that sketch,” he thought, when he had closed the door behind her. “I should be sorry for her to guess that I thought her fine husband a good model for a coward. But I made light of it; she’ll not think of it again.”

Piero was too sanguine, as open-hearted men are apt to be when they attempt a little clever simulation. The thought of the picture pressed more and more on Romola as she walked homeward. She could not help putting together the two facts of the chain armour and the encounter mentioned by Piero between her husband and the prisoner, which had happened on the morning of the day when the armour was adopted. That look of terror which the painter had given Tito, had he seen it? What could it all mean?

“It means nothing,” she tried to assure herself. “It was a mere coincidence. Shall I ask Tito about

it?" Her mind said at last, "No: I will not question him about anything he did not tell me spontaneously. It is an offence against the trust I owe him." Her heart said, "I dare not ask him."

There was a terrible flaw in the trust: she was afraid of any hasty movement, as men are who hold something precious and want to believe that it is not broken.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A MOMENT OF TRIUMPH.

“THE old fellow has vanished; went on towards Arezzo the next morning; not liking the smell of the French, I suppose, after being their prisoner. I went to the hospital to inquire after him; I wanted to know if those broth-making monks had found out whether he was in his right mind or not. However, they said he showed no signs of madness—only took no notice of questions, and seemed to be planting a vine twenty miles off. He was a mysterious old tiger. I should have liked to know something more about him.”

It was in Nello's shop that Piero di Cosimo was speaking, on the twenty-fourth of November, just a week after the entrance of the French. There was a party of six or seven assembled at the rather unusual hour of three in the afternoon; for it was a day on which all Florence was excited by the prospect of some decisive political event. Every lounging-place was full, and every shopkeeper who had no wife or deputy to leave in charge stood at his door with his thumbs in his belt; while the streets were

constantly sprinkled with artisans pausing or passing lazily like floating splinters, ready to rush forward impetuously if any object attracted them.

Nello had been thrumming the lute as he half sat on the board against the shop window, and kept an outlook towards the piazza.

“Ah,” he said, laying down the lute, with emphasis, “I would not for a gold florin have missed that sight of the French soldiers waddling in their broad shoes after their runaway prisoners! That comes of leaving my shop to shave magnificent chins. It is always so: if ever I quit this navel of the earth something takes the opportunity of happening in my piazza.”

“Yes, you ought to have been there,” said Piero, in his biting way, “just to see your favourite Greek look as frightened as if Satanasso had laid hold of him. I like to see your ready smiling Messeri caught in a sudden wind and obliged to show their lining in spite of themselves. What colour do you think a man’s liver is, who looks like a bleached deer as soon as a chance stranger lays hold of him suddenly?”

“Piero, keep that vinegar of thine as sauce to thine own eggs! What is it against my bel erudito that he looked startled when he felt a pair of claws upon him and saw an unchained madman at his elbow? Your scholar is not like those beastly Swiss and Germans, whose heads are fit for nothing but

battering-rams, and who have such large appetites that they think nothing of taking a cannon-ball before breakfast. We Florentines count some other qualities in a man besides that vulgar stuff called bravery, which is to be got by hiring dunderheads at so much per dozen. I tell you, as soon as men found out they had more brains than oxen they set the oxen to draw for them, and when we Florentines found out that we had more brains than other men we set them to fight for us."

"Treason, Nello!" a voice called out from the inner sanctum; "that is not the doctrine of the State. Florence is grinding its weapons; and the last well-authenticated vision announced by the Frate was Mars standing on the Palazzo Vecchio with his arm on the shoulder of San Giovanni Battista, who was offering him a piece of honeycomb."

"It is well, Francesco," said Nello. "Florence has a few thicker skulls that may do to bombard Pisa with; there will still be the finer spirits left at home to do the thinking and the shaving. And, as for our Piero here, if he makes such a point of valour, let him carry his biggest brush for a weapon and his palette for a shield, and challenge the widest-mouthed Swiss he can see in the Prato to a single combat."

"*Va*, Nello," growled Piero, "thy tongue runs on as usual, like a mill when the Arno's full—whether there's grist or not."

“Excellent grist, I tell thee. For it would be as reasonable to expect a grizzled painter like thee to be fond of getting a javelin inside thee as to expect a man whose wits have been sharpened on the classics to like having his handsome face clawed by a wild beast.”

“There you go, supposing you’ll get people to put their legs into a sack because you call it a pair of hosen,” said Piero. “Who said anything about a wild beast, or about an unarmed man rushing on battle? Fighting is a trade, and it’s not my trade. I should be a fool to run after danger, but I could face it if it came to me.”

“How is it you’re so afraid of the thunder then, my Piero?” said Nello, determined to chase down the accuser. “You ought to be able to understand why one man is shaken by a thing that seems a trifle to others—you who hide yourself with the rats as soon as a storm comes on.”

“That is because I have a particular sensibility to loud sounds; it has nothing to do with my courage or my conscience.”

“Well, and Tito Melema may have a peculiar sensibility to being laid hold of unexpectedly by prisoners who have run away from French soldiers. Men are born with antipathies; I myself can’t abide the smell of mint. Tito was born with an antipathy to old prisoners who stumble and clutch. Ecco!”

There was a general laugh at Nello’s defence, and

it was clear that Piero's disinclination towards Tito was not shared by the company. The painter, with his undecipherable grimace, took the tow from his scarsella and stuffed his ears in indignant contempt, while Nello went on triumphantly,—

“No, my Piero, I can't afford to have my *bel erudito* decried; and Florence can't afford it either, with her scholars moulting off her at the early age of forty. Our Phoenix Pico just gone straight to Paradise, as the Frate has informed us; and the incomparable Poliziano, not two months since, gone to—— well, well, let us hope he is not gone to the eminent scholars in the *Malebolge*.”

“By the way,” said Francesco Cei, “have you heard that Camilla Rucellai has outdone the Frate in her prophecies? She prophesied two years ago that Pico would die in the time of lilies. He has died in November. ‘Not at all the time of lilies,’ said the scorners. ‘Go to!’ says Camilla; ‘it is the lilies of France I meant, and it seems to me they are close enough under your nostrils.’ I say, ‘Euge, Camilla!’ If the Frate can prove that any one of his visions has been as well fulfilled, I'll declare myself a Piagnone to-morrow.”

“You are something too flippant about the Frate, Francesco,” said Pietro Cennini, the scholarly. “We are all indebted to him in these weeks for preaching peace and quietness, and the laying aside of party quarrels. They are men of small discern-



ment who would be glad to see the people slipping the Frate's leash just now. And if the Most Christian King is obstinate about the treaty to-day, and will not sign what is fair and honourable to Florence, Fra Girolamo is the man we must trust in to bring him to reason."

"You speak truth, Messer Pietro," said Nello; "the Frate is one of the firmest nails Florence has to hang on—at least, that is the opinion of the most respectable chins I have the honour of shaving. But young Messer Niccolò was saying here the other morning—and doubtless Francesco means the same thing—there is as wonderful a power of stretching in the meaning of visions as in Dido's bull's hide. It seems to me a dream may mean whatever comes after it. As our Franco Sacchetti says, a woman dreams over-night of a serpent biting her, breaks a drinking-cup the next day, and cries out, 'Look you, I thought something would happen—it's plain now what the serpent meant.'"

"But the Frate's visions are not of that sort," said Cronaca. "He not only says what will happen—that the Church will be scourged and renovated, and the heathens converted—he says it shall happen quickly. He is no slippery pretender who provides loopholes for himself, he is——"

"What is this? what is this?" exclaimed Nello, jumping off the board, and putting his head out at the door. "Here are people streaming into the

piazza, and shouting. Something must have happened in the Via Larga. Aha!" he burst forth with delighted astonishment, stepping out, laughing, and waving his cap.

All the rest of the company hastened to the door. News from the Via Larga was just what they had been waiting for. But if the news had come into the piazza, they were not a little surprised at the form of its advent. Carried above the shoulders of the people, on a bench apparently snatched up in the street, sat Tito Melema, in smiling amusement at the compulsion he was under. His cap had slipped off his head, and hung by the *becchetto* which was wound loosely round his neck; and as he saw the group at Nello's door he lifted up his fingers in beckoning recognition. The next minute he had leaped from the bench on to a cart filled with bales, that stood in the broad space between the Baptistery and the steps of the Duomo, while the people swarmed round him with the noisy eagerness of poultry expecting to be fed. But there was silence when he began to speak in his clear mellow voice—

"Citizens of Florence! I have no warrant to tell the news except your will. But the news is good, and will harm no man in the telling. The Most Christian King is signing a treaty that is honourable to Florence. But you owe it to one of your citizens, who spoke a word worthy of the ancient Romans—you owe it to Piero Capponi!"

Immediately there was a roar of voices.

“Capponi! Capponi! What said our Piero?”  
“Ah! he wouldn’t stand being sent from Herod to Pilate!” “We knew Piero!” “*Orsù!* Tell us, what did he say?”

When the roar of insistance had subsided a little, Tito began again—

“The Most Christian King demanded a little too much—was obstinate—said at last, ‘I shall order my trumpets to sound.’ Then, Florentine citizens! your Piero Capponi, speaking with the voice of a free city, said, ‘If you sound your trumpets, we will ring our bells!’ He snatched the copy of the dishonouring conditions from the hands of the secretary, tore it in pieces, and turned to leave the royal presence.”

Again there were loud shouts—and again impatient demands for more.

“Then, Florentines, the high majesty of France felt, perhaps for the first time, all the majesty of a free city. And the Most Christian King himself hastened from his place to call Piero Capponi back. The great spirit of your Florentine city did its work by a great word, without need of the great actions that lay ready behind it. And the King has consented to sign the treaty, which preserves the honour, as well as the safety, of Florence. The banner of France will float over every Florentine galley in sign of amity and common privilege, but above that banner will be written the word ‘Liberty!’

“That is all the news I have to tell; is it not enough?—since it is for the glory of every one of you, citizens of Florence, that you have a fellow-citizen who knows how to speak your will.”

As the shouts rose again, Tito looked round with inward amusement at the various crowd, each of whom was elated with the notion that Piero Capponi had somehow represented him—that he was the mind of which Capponi was the mouthpiece. He enjoyed the humour of the incident, which had suddenly transformed him, an alien and a friend of the Medici, into an orator who tickled the ears of the people blatant for some unknown good which they called liberty. He felt quite glad that he had been laid hold of and hurried along by the crowd as he was coming out of the palace in the Via Larga with a commission to the Signoria. It was very easy, very pleasant, this exercise of speaking to the general satisfaction: a man who knew how to persuade need never be in danger from any party; he could convince each that he was feigning with all the others. The gestures and faces of weavers and dyers were certainly amusing when looked at from above in this way.

Tito was beginning to get easier in his armour, and at this moment was quite unconscious of it. He stood with one hand holding his recovered cap, and with the other at his belt, the light of a complacent smile in his long lustrous eyes, as he made a parting

reverence to his audience, before springing down from the bales—when suddenly his glance met that of a man who had not at all the amusing aspect of the exulting weavers, dyers, and wool-carders. The face of this man was clean shaven, his hair close-clipped, and he wore a decent felt hat. A single glance would hardly have sufficed to assure any one but Tito that this was the face of the escaped prisoner who had laid hold of him on the steps. But to Tito it came not simply as the face of the escaped prisoner, but as a face with which he had been familiar long years before.

It seemed all compressed into a second—the sight of Baldassarre looking at him, the sensation shooting through him like a fiery arrow, and the act of leaping from the cart. He would have leaped down in the same instant, whether he had seen Baldassarre or not, for he was in a hurry to be gone to the Palazzo Vecchio: this time he had not betrayed himself by look or movement, and he said inwardly that he should not be taken by surprise again; he should be prepared to see this face rise up continually like the intermittent blotch that comes in diseased vision. But this reappearance of Baldassarre so much more in his own likeness tightened the pressure of dread: the idea of his madness lost its likelihood now he was shaven and clad like a decent though poor citizen. Certainly, there was a great change in his face; but how could it be otherwise? And yet, if

he were perfectly sane—in possession of all his powers and all his learning—why was he lingering in this way before making known his identity? It must be for the sake of making his scheme of vengeance more complete. But he did linger: that at least gave an opportunity for flight. And Tito began to think that flight was his only resource.

But while he, with his back turned on the Piazza del Duomo, had lost the recollection of the new part he had been playing, and was no longer thinking of the many things which a ready brain and tongue made easy, but of a few things which destiny had somehow made very difficult, the enthusiasm which he had fed contemptuously was creating a scene in that piazza in grand contrast with the inward drama of self-centered fear which he had carried away from it.

The crowd, on Tito's disappearance, had begun to turn their faces towards the outlets of the piazza in the direction of the Via Larga, when the sight of *mazzieri*, or mace-bearers, entering from the Via de' Martelli, announced the approach of dignitaries. They must be the syndics, or commissioners charged with the effecting of the treaty; the treaty must be already signed, and they had come away from the royal presence. Piero Capponi was coming—the brave heart that had known how to speak for Florence. The effect on the crowd was remarkable; they parted with softening, dropping voices,

subsiding into silence,—and the silence became so perfect that the tread of the syndics on the broad pavement, and the rustle of their black silk garments, could be heard, like rain in the night. There were four of them; but it was not the two learned doctors of law, Messer Guidantonio Vespucci and Messer Domenico Bonsi, that the crowd waited for; it was not Francesco Valori, popular as he had become in these late days. The moment belonged to another man, of firm presence, as little inclined to humour the people as to humour any other unreasonable claimants—loving order, like one who by force of fortune had been made a merchant, and by force of nature had become a soldier. It was not till he was seen at the entrance of the piazza that the silence was broken, and then one loud shout of “Capponi, Capponi! Well done, Capponi!” rang through the piazza.

The simple, resolute man looked round him with grave joy. His fellow-citizens gave him a great funeral two years later, when he had died in fight: there were torches carried by all the magistracy, and torches again, and trains of banners. But it is not known that he felt any joy in the oration that was delivered in his praise, as the banners waved over his bier. Let us be glad that he got some thanks and praise while he lived.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE AVENGER'S SECRET.

It was the first time that Baldassarre had been in the Piazza del Duomo since his escape. He had a strong desire to hear the remarkable monk preach again, but he had shrunk from reappearing in the same spot where he had been seen half naked, with neglected hair, with a rope round his neck—in the same spot where he had been called a madman. The feeling, in its freshness, was too strong to be overcome by any trust he had in the change he had made in his appearance; for when the words “some madman, surely,” had fallen from Tito’s lips, it was not their baseness and cruelty only that had made their viper sting—it was Baldassarre’s instantaneous bitter consciousness that he might be unable to prove the words false. Along with the passionate desire for vengeance which possessed him had arisen the keen sense that his power of achieving the vengeance was doubtful. It was as if Tito had been helped by some diabolical prompter, who had whispered Baldassarre’s saddest secret in the traitor’s ear. He was not mad;



for he carried within him that piteous stamp of sanity, the clear consciousness of shattered faculties: he measured his own feebleness. With the first movements of vindictive rage awoke a vague caution, like that of a wild beast that is fierce but feeble—or like that of an insect whose little fragment of earth has given way, and made it pause in a palsy of distrust. It was this distrust, this determination to take no step which might betray anything concerning himself, that had made Baldassarre reject Piero di Cosimo's friendly advances.

He had been equally cautious at the hospital, only telling, in answer to the questions of the brethren there, that he had been made a prisoner by the French on his way from Genoa. But his age, and the indications in his speech and manner that he was of a different class from the ordinary mendicants and poor travellers who were entertained in the hospital, had induced the monks to offer him extra charity: a coarse woollen tunic to protect him from the cold, a pair of peasant's shoes, and a few *danari*, smallest of Florentine coins, to help him on his way. He had gone on the road to Arezzo early in the morning; but he had paused at the first little town, and had used a couple of his *danari* to get himself shaved, and to have his circle of hair clipped short, in his former fashion. The barber there had a little hand-mirror of bright steel: it was a long while, it was years, since Baldassarre had looked at himself, and now, as

his eyes fell on that hand-mirror, a new thought shot through his mind. "Was he so changed that Tito really did not know him?" The thought was such a sudden arrest of impetuous currents, that it was a painful shock to him: his hand shook like a leaf, as he put away the barber's arm and asked for the mirror. He wished to see himself before he was shaved. The barber, noticing his tremulousness, held the mirror for him.

No, he was not so changed as that. He himself had known the wrinkles as they had been three years ago; they were only deeper now: there was the same rough, clumsy skin, making little superficial bosses on the brow, like so many cipher marks; the skin was only yellower, only looked more like a lifeless rind. That shaggy white beard—it was no disguise to eyes that had looked closely at him for sixteen years—to eyes that ought to have searched for him with the expectation of finding him changed, as men search for the beloved among the bodies cast up by the waters. There was something different in his glance, but it was a difference that should only have made the recognition of him the more startling; for is not a known voice all the more thrilling when it is heard as a cry? But the doubt was folly: he had felt that Tito knew him. He put out his hand and pushed the mirror away. The strong currents were rushing on again, and the energies of hatred and vengeance were active once more.

He went back on the way towards Florence again, but he did not wish to enter the city till dusk ; so he turned aside from the high-road, and sat down by a little pool shadowed on one side by alder-bushes still sprinkled with yellow leaves. It was a calm November day, and he no sooner saw the pool than he thought its still surface might be a mirror for him. He wanted to contemplate himself slowly, as he had not dared to do in the presence of the barber. He sat down on the edge of the pool, and bent forward to look earnestly at the image of himself.

Was there something wandering and imbecile in his face—something like what he felt in his mind?

Not now ; not when he was examining himself with a look of eager inquiry : on the contrary, there was an intense purpose in his eyes. But at other times ? Yes, it must be so : in the long hours when he had the vague aching of an unremembered past within him—when he seemed to sit in dark loneliness, visited by whispers which died out mockingly as he strained his ear after them, and by forms that seemed to approach him and float away as he thrust out his hand to grasp them—in those hours, doubtless, there must be continual frustration and amazement in his glance. And, more horrible still, when the thick cloud parted for a moment, and, as he sprang forward with hope, rolled together again, and left him helpless as before ; doubtless then, there was a blank

confusion in his face, as of a man suddenly smitten with blindness.

Could he prove anything? Could he even begin to allege anything, with the confidence that the links of thought would not break away? Would any believe that he had ever had a mind filled with rare knowledge, busy with close thoughts, ready with various speech? It had all slipped away from him—that laboriously gathered store. Was it utterly and for ever gone from him, like the waters from an urn lost in the wide ocean? Or, was it still within him, imprisoned by some obstruction that might one day break asunder?

It might be so; he tried to keep his grasp on that hope. For, since the day when he had first walked feebly from his couch of straw, and had felt a new darkness within him under the sunlight, his mind had undergone changes, partly gradual and persistent, partly sudden and fleeting. As he had recovered his strength of body, he had recovered his self-command and the energy of his will; he had recovered the memory of all that part of his life which was closely inwrought with his emotions; and he had felt more and more constantly and painfully the uneasy sense of lost knowledge. But more than that—once or twice, when he had been strongly excited, he had seemed momentarily to be in entire possession of his past self, as old men doze for an instant and get back the consciousness of their youth: he seemed again to

see Greek pages and understand them, again to feel his mind moving unbenumbed among familiar ideas. It had been but a flash, and the darkness closing in again seemed the more horrible; but might not the same thing happen again for longer periods? If it would only come and stay long enough for him to achieve a revenge—devise an exquisite suffering, such as a mere right arm could never inflict!

He raised himself from his stooping attitude, and, folding his arms, attempted to concentrate all his mental force on the plan he must immediately pursue. He had to wait for knowledge and opportunity, and while he waited he must have the means of living without beggary. What he dreaded of all things now was, that any one should think him a foolish, helpless old man. No one must know that half his memory was gone: the lost strength might come again; and if it were only for a little while, *that* might be enough.

He knew how to begin to get the information he wanted about Tito. He had repeated the words "Bratti Ferravecchi" so constantly after they had been uttered to him, that they never slipped from him for long together. A man at Genoa, on whose finger he had seen Tito's ring, had told him that he bought that ring at Florence, of a young Greek, well dressed, and with a handsome dark face, in the shop of a *rigattiere* called Bratti Ferravecchi, in the street also called Ferravecchi. This discovery had caused a

violent agitation in Baldassarre. Until then he had clung with all the tenacity of his fervid nature to his faith in Tito, and had not for a moment believed himself to be wilfully forsaken. At first he had said, "My bit of parchment has never reached him; that is why I am still toiling at Antioch. But he is searching; he knows where I was lost; he will trace me out, and find me at last." Then, when he was taken to Corinth, he induced his owners, by the assurance that he should be sought out and ransomed, to provide securely against the failure of any inquiries that might be made about him at Antioch; and at Corinth he thought joyfully, "Here, at last, he must find me. Here he is sure to touch, whichever way he goes." But before another year had passed, the illness had come from which he had risen with body and mind so shattered that he was worse than worthless to his owners except for the sake of the ransom that did not come. Then, as he sat helpless in the morning sunlight, he began to think, "Tito has been drowned, or they have made *him* a prisoner too. I shall see him no more. He set out after me, but misfortune overtook him. I shall see his face no more." Sitting in his new feebleness and despair, supporting his head between his hands, with blank eyes and lips that moved uncertainly, he looked so much like a hopelessly imbecile old man, that his owners were contented to be rid of him, and allowed a Genoese merchant, who had compassion on

him as an Italian, to take him on board his galley. In a voyage of many months in the Archipelago and along the sea-board of Asia Minor, Baldassarre had recovered his bodily strength, but on landing at Genoa he had so weary a sense of his desolateness that he almost wished he had died of that illness at Corinth. There was just one possibility that hindered the wish from being decided: it was that Tito might not be dead, but living in a state of imprisonment or destitution; and if he lived, there was still a hope for Baldassarre—faint, perhaps, and likely to be long deferred, but still a hope, that he might find his child, his cherished son again; might yet again clasp hands and meet face to face with the one being who remembered him as he had been before his mind was broken.

In this state of feeling he had chanced to meet the stranger who wore Tito's onyx ring, and though Baldassarre would have been unable to describe the ring beforehand, the sight of it stirred the dormant fibres, and he recognized it. That Tito nearly a year after his father had been parted from him should have been living in apparent prosperity at Florence, selling the gem which he ought not to have sold till the last extremity, was a fact that Baldassarre shrank from trying to account for; he was glad to be stunned and bewildered by it, rather than to have any distinct thought; he tried to feel nothing but joy that he should behold Tito again.

Perhaps Tito had thought that his father was dead ; somehow the mystery would be explained. " But at least I shall meet eyes that will remember me ; I am not alone in the world."

And now again Baldassarre said, " I am not alone in the world ; I shall never be alone, for my revenge is with me."

It was as the instrument of that revenge, as something merely external and subservient to his true life, that he bent down again to examine himself with hard curiosity—not, he thought, because he had any care for a withered, forsaken old man, whom nobody loved, whose soul was like a deserted home, where the ashes were cold upon the hearth, and the walls were bare of all but the marks of what had been. It is in the nature of all human passion, the lowest as well as the highest, that there is a point at which it ceases to be properly egoistic, and is like a fire kindled within our being to which everything else in us is mere fuel.

He looked at the pale black-browed image in the water till he identified it with that self from which his revenge seemed to be a thing apart ; and he felt as if the image too heard the silent language of his thought.

" I was a loving fool—I worshipped a woman once, and believed she could care for me ; and then I took a helpless child and fostered him ; and I watched him as he grew, to see if he would care for me only



a little—care for *me* over and above the good he got from me. I would have torn open my breast to warm him with my life-blood if I could only have seen him care a little for the pain of my wound. I have laboured, I have strained to crush out of this hard life one drop of unselfish love. Fool! men love their own delights; there is no delight to be had in me. And yet I watched till I believed I saw what I watched for. When he was a child he lifted soft eyes towards me, and held my hand willingly: I thought, this boy will surely love me a little: because I give my life to him and strive that he shall know no sorrow, he will care a little when I am thirsty—the drop he lays on my parched lips will be a joy to him. . . . Curses on him! I wish I may see him lie with those red lips white and dry as ashes, and when he looks for pity I wish he may see my face rejoicing in his pain. It is all a lie—this world is a lie—there is no goodness but in hate. Fool! not one drop of love came with all your striving: life has not given you one drop. But there are deep draughts in this world for hatred and revenge. I have memory left for that, and there is strength in my arm—there is strength in my will—and if I can do nothing but kill him——”

But Baldassarre's mind rejected the thought of that brief punishment. His whole soul had been thrilled into immediate unreasoning belief in that eternity of vengeance where he, an undying hate,

might clutch for ever an undying traitor, and hear that fair smiling hardness cry and moan with anguish. But the primary need and hope was to see a slow revenge under the same sky and on the same earth where he himself had been forsaken and had fainted with despair. And as soon as he tried to concentrate his mind on the means of attaining his end, the sense of his weakness pressed upon him like a frosty ache. This despised body, which was to be the instrument of a sublime vengeance, must be nourished and decently clad. If he had to wait he must labour, and his labour must be of a humble sort, for he had no skill. He wondered whether the sight of written characters would so stimulate his faculties that he might venture to try and find work as a copyist: *that* might win him some credence for his past scholarship. But no! he dared trust neither hand nor brain. He must be content to do the work that was most like that of a beast of burden: in this mercantile city many porters must be wanted, and he could at least carry weights. Thanks to the justice that struggled in this confused world in behalf of vengeance, his limbs had got back some of their old sturdiness. He was stripped of all else that men would give coin for.

But the new urgency of this habitual thought brought a new suggestion. There was something hanging by a cord round his bare neck; something apparently so paltry that the piety of Turks and

Frenchmen had spared it—a tiny parchment bag blackened with age. It had hung round his neck as a precious charm when he was a boy, and he had kept it carefully on his breast, not believing that it contained anything but a tiny scroll of parchment rolled up hard. He might long ago have thrown it away as a relic of his dead mother's superstition; but he had thought of it as a relic of her love, and had kept it. It was part of the piety associated with such *brevis*, that they should never be opened, and at any previous moment in his life Baldassarre would have said that no sort of thirst would prevail upon him to open this little bag for the chance of finding that it contained, not parchment, but an engraved amulet which would be worth money. But now a thirst had come like that which makes men open their own veins to satisfy it, and the thought of the possible amulet no sooner crossed Baldassarre's mind than with nervous fingers he snatched the *breve* from his neck. It all rushed through his mind—the long years he had worn it, the far-off sunny balcony at Naples looking towards the blue waters, where he had leaned against his mother's knee; but it made no moment of hesitation: all piety now was transmuted into a just revenge. He bit and tore till the doubles of parchment were laid open, and then—it was a sight that made him pant—there *was* an amulet. It was very small, but it was as blue as those far-off waters; it was an engraved sapphire,

which must be worth some gold ducats. Baldassarre no sooner saw those possible ducats than he saw some of them exchanged for a poniard. He did not want to use the poniard yet, but he longed to possess it. If he could grasp its handle and feel its edge, that blank in his mind—that past which fell away continually—would not make him feel so cruelly helpless: the sharp steel that despised talents and eluded strength would be at his side, as the unfailing friend of feeble justice. There was a sparkling triumph under Baldassarre's black eyebrows as he replaced the little sapphire inside the bits of parchment and wound the string tightly round them.

It was nearly dusk now, and he rose to walk back towards Florence. With his *danari* to buy him some bread, he felt rich: he could lie out in the open air, as he found plenty more doing in all corners of Florence. And in the next few days he had sold his sapphire, had added to his clothing, had bought a bright dagger, and had still a pair of gold florins left. But he meant to hoard that treasure carefully: his lodging was an outhouse with a heap of straw in it, in a thinly inhabited part of Oltrarno, and he thought of looking about for work as a porter.

He had bought his dagger at Bratti's. Paying his meditated visit there one evening at dusk, he had found that singular rag-merchant just returned from one of his rounds, emptying out his basketful of broken glass

and old iron amongst his handsome show of heterogeneous second-hand goods. As Baldassarre entered the shop, and looked towards the smart pieces of apparel, the musical instruments, and weapons, that were displayed in the broadest light of the window, his eye at once singled out a dagger that hung up high against a red scarf. By buying that dagger he could not only satisfy a strong desire, he could open his original errand in a more indirect manner than by speaking of the onyx ring. In the course of bargaining for the weapon he let drop, with cautious carelessness, that he came from Genoa, and had been directed to Bratti's shop by an acquaintance in that city who had bought a very valuable ring there. Had the respectable trader any more such rings?

Whereupon Bratti had much to say as to the unlikelihood of such rings being within reach of many people, with much vaunting of his own rare connections, due to his known wisdom and honesty. It might be true that he was a pedlar—he chose to be a pedlar; though he was rich enough to kick his heels in his shop all day. But those who thought they had said all there was to be said about Bratti, when they had called him a pedlar, were a good deal further off the truth than the other side of Pisa. How was it that he could put that ring in a stranger's way? It was, because he had a very particular knowledge of a handsome young signor, who did not look quite so fine a feathered bird when Bratti first set

eyes on him as he did at the present time. And by a question or two Baldassarre extracted, without any trouble, such a rough and rambling account of Tito's life as the pedlar could give, since the time when he had found him sleeping under the Loggia de' Cerchi. It never occurred to Bratti that the decent man (who was rather deaf, apparently, asking him to say many things twice over) had any curiosity about Tito; the curiosity was doubtless about himself, as a truly remarkable pedlar.

And Baldassarre left Bratti's shop, not only with the dagger at his side, but with a general knowledge of Tito's conduct and position—of his early sale of the jewels, his immediate quiet settlement of himself at Florence, his marriage, and his great prosperity.

“What story had he told about his previous life—about his father?”

That was a question to which it would be difficult for Baldassarre to discover the answer. Meanwhile, he wanted to learn all he could about Florence. But he found, to his acute distress, that of the new details he learned he could only retain a few, and those only by continual repetition; and he began to be afraid of listening to any new discourse, lest it should obliterate what he was already striving to remember.

The day he was discerned by Tito in the Piazza del Duomo, he had the fresh anguish of this consciousness in his mind, and Tito's ready speech fell upon him like the mockery of a glib, defying demon.

As he went home to his heap of straw, and passed by the booksellers' shops in the Via del Garbo, he paused to look at the volumes spread open. Could he by long gazing at one of those books lay hold of the slippery threads of memory? Could he, by striving, get a firm grasp somewhere, and lift himself above these waters that flowed over him?"

He was tempted, and bought the cheapest Greek book he could see. He carried it home and sat on his heap of straw, looking at the characters by the light of the small window; but no inward light arose on them. Soon the evening darkness came; but it made little difference to Baldassarre. His strained eyes seemed still to see the white pages with the unintelligible black marks upon them.

## CHAPTER XI.

## FRUIT IS SEED.

“MY Romola,” said Tito, the second morning after he had made his speech in the Piazza del Duomo, “I am to receive grand visitors to-day; the Milanese Count is coming again, and the Seneschal de Beaucaire, the great favourite of the Cristianissimo. I know you don’t care to go through smiling ceremonies with these rustling magnates, whom we are not likely to see again; and as they will want to look at the antiquities and the library, perhaps you had better give up your work to-day, and go to see your cousin Brigida.”

Romola discerned a wish in this intimation, and immediately assented. But presently, coming back in her hood and mantle, she said, “Oh, what a long breath Florence will take when the gates are flung open, and the last Frenchman is walking out of them! Even you are getting tired, with all your patience, my Tito; confess it. Ah, your head is hot.”



He was leaning over his desk, writing, and she had laid her hand on his head, meaning to give a parting caress. The attitude had been a frequent one, and Tito was accustomed, when he felt her hand there, to raise his head, throw himself a little backward, and look up at her. But he felt now as unable to raise his head as if her hand had been a leaden cowl. He spoke instead, in a light tone, as his pen still ran along.

“The French are as ready to go from Florence as the wasps to leave a ripe pear when they have just fastened on it.”

Romola, keenly sensitive to the absence of the usual response, took away her hand and said, “I am going, Tito.”

“Farewell, my sweet one. I must wait at home. Take Maso with you.”

Still Tito did not look up, and Romola went out without saying any more. Very slight things make epochs in married life, and this morning for the first time she admitted to herself not only that Tito had changed, but that he had changed towards her. Did the reason lie in herself? She might perhaps have thought so, if there had not been the facts of the armour and the picture to suggest some external event which was an entire mystery to her.

But Tito no sooner believed that Romola was out of the house than he laid down his pen and looked up, in delightful security from seeing anything else

than parchment and broken marble. He was rather disgusted with himself that he had not been able to look up at Romola and behave to her just as usual. He would have chosen, if he could, to be even more than usually kind; but he could not, on a sudden, master an involuntary shrinking from her, which, by a subtle relation, depended on those very characteristics in him that made him desire not to fail in his marks of affection. He was about to take a step which he knew would arouse her deep indignation; he would have to encounter much that was unpleasant before he could win her forgiveness. And Tito could never find it easy to face displeasure and anger; his nature was one of those most remote from defiance or impudence, and all his inclinations leaned towards preserving Romola's tenderness. He was not tormented by sentimental scruples which, as he had demonstrated to himself by a very rapid course of argument, had no relation to solid utility; but his freedom from scruples did not release him from the dread of what was disagreeable. Unscrupulousness gets rid of much, but not of toothache, or wounded vanity, or the sense of loneliness, against which, as the world at present stands, there is no security but a thoroughly healthy jaw, and a just, loving soul. And Tito was feeling intensely at this moment that no devices could save him from pain in the impending collision with Romola; no persuasive blandness could cushion him against the shock to-

wards which he was being driven like a timid animal urged to a desperate leap by the terror of the tooth and the claw that are close behind it.

The secret feeling he had previously had that the tenacious adherence to Bardo's wishes about the library had become under existing difficulties a piece of sentimental folly, which deprived himself and Romola of substantial advantages, might perhaps never have wrought itself into action but for the events of the past week, which had brought at once the pressure of a new motive and the outlet of a rare opportunity. Nay, it was not till his dread had been aggravated by the sight of Baldassarre looking more like his sane self, not until he had begun to feel that he might be compelled to flee from Florence, that he had brought himself to resolve on using his legal right to sell the library before the great opportunity offered by French and Milanese bidders slipped through his fingers. For if he had to leave Florence he did not want to leave it as a destitute wanderer. He had been used to an agreeable existence, and he wished to carry with him all the means at hand for retaining the same agreeable conditions. He wished among other things to carry Romola with him, and *not*, if possible, to carry any infamy. Success had given him a growing appetite for all the pleasures that depend on an advantageous social position, and at no moment could it look like a temptation to him, but only like a hideous alternative, to decamp under

dishonour, even with a bag of diamonds, and incur the life of an adventurer. It was not possible for him to make himself independent even of those Florentines who only greeted him with regard; still less was it possible for him to make himself independent of Romola. She was the wife of his first love—he loved her still; she belonged to that furniture of life which he shrank from parting with. He winced under her judgment, he felt uncertain how far the revulsion of her feeling towards him might go; and all that sense of power over a wife which makes a husband risk betrayals that a lover never ventures on, would not suffice to counteract Tito's uneasiness. This was the leaden weight which had been too strong for his will, and kept him from raising his head to meet her eyes. Their pure light brought too near him the prospect of a coming struggle. But it was not to be helped: if they had to leave Florence, they must have money; indeed, Tito could not arrange life at all to his mind without a considerable sum of money. And that problem of arranging life to his mind had been the source of all his misdoing. He would have been equal to any sacrifice that was not unpleasant.

The rustling magnates came and went, the bargains had been concluded, and Romola returned home; but nothing grave was said that night. Tito was only gay and chatty, pouring forth to her, as he had not done before, stories and descriptions of what he

had witnessed during the French visit. Romola thought she discerned an effort in his liveliness, and attributing it to the consciousness in him that she had been wounded in the morning, accepted the effort as an act of penitence, inwardly aching a little at that sign of growing distance between them—that there was an offence about which neither of them dared to speak.

The next day Tito remained away from home until late at night. It was a marked day to Romola, for Piero di Cosimo, stimulated to greater industry on her behalf by the fear that he might have been the cause of pain to her in the past week, had sent home her father's portrait. She had propped it against the back of his old chair, and had been looking at it for some time, when the door opened behind her, and Bernardo del Nero came in.

“It is you, godfather! How I wish you had come sooner: it is getting a little dusk,” said Romola, going towards him.

“I have just looked in to tell you the good news, for I know Tito is not come yet,” said Bernardo. “The French king moves off to-morrow; not before it is high time. There has been another tussle between our people and his soldiers this morning. But there's a chance now of the city getting into order once more and trade going on.”

“That is joyful,” said Romola. “But it is sudden, is it not? Tito seemed to think yesterday

that there was little prospect of the king's going soon."

"He has been well barked at, that's the reason," said Bernardo, smiling. "His own generals opened their throats pretty well, and at last our Signoria sent the mastiff of the city, Fra Girolamo. The Cristianissimo was frightened at that thunder, and has given the order to move. I'm afraid there'll be small agreement among us when he's gone, but, at any rate, all parties are agreed in being glad not to have Florence stifled with soldiery any longer, and the Frate has barked this time to some purpose. Ah, what is this?" he added, as Romola, clasping him by the arm, led him in front of the picture. "Let us see."

He began to unwind his long scarf while she placed a seat for him.

"Don't you want your spectacles, godfather?" said Romola, in anxiety that he should see just what she saw.

"No, child, no," said Bernardo, uncovering his grey head, as he seated himself with firm erectness. "For seeing at this distance, my old eyes are perhaps better than your young ones. Old men's eyes are like old men's memories; they are strongest for things a long way off."

"It is better than having no portrait," said Romola, apologetically, after Bernardo had been silent a little while. "It is less like him now than the image I

have in my mind, but then that might fade with the years." She rested her arm on the old man's shoulder as she spoke, drawn towards him strongly by their common interest in the dead.

"I don't know," said Bernardo. "I almost think I see Bardo as he was when he was young, better than that picture shows him to me as he was when he was old. Your father had a great deal of fire in his eyes when he was young. It was what I could never understand, that he, with his fiery spirit, which seemed much more impatient than mine, could hang over the books and live with shadows all his life. However, he had put his heart into that."

Bernardo gave a slight shrug as he spoke the last words, but Romola discerned in his voice a feeling that accorded with her own.

"And he was disappointed to the last," she said, involuntarily. But immediately fearing lest her words should be taken to imply an accusation against Tito, she went on almost hurriedly, "If we could only see his longest, dearest wish fulfilled just to his mind!"

"Well, so we may," said Bernardo, kindly, rising and putting on his cap. "The times are cloudy now, but fish are caught by waiting. Who knows? When the wheel has turned often enough, I may be Gonfaloniere yet before I die; and no creditor can touch these things." He looked round as he spoke.

Then, turning to her, and patting her cheek, said, "And you need not be afraid of my dying; my ghost will claim nothing. I've taken care of that in my will."

Romola seized the hand that was against her cheek, and put it to her lips in silence.

"Haven't you been scolding your husband for keeping away from home so much lately? I see him everywhere but here," said Bernardo, willing to change the subject.

She felt the flush spread over her neck and face as she said, "He has been very much wanted; you know he speaks so well. I am glad to know that his value is understood."

"You are contented then, Madonna Orgogliosa?" said Bernardo, smiling, as he moved to the door.

"Assuredly."

Poor Romola! There was one thing that would have made the pang of disappointment in her husband harder to bear: it was, that any one should know he gave her cause for disappointment. This might be a woman's weakness, but it is closely allied to a woman's nobleness. She who willingly lifts up the veil of her married life has profaned it from a sanctuary into a vulgar place.



## CHAPTER XII.

## A REVELATION.

THE next day Romola, like every other Florentine, was excited about the departure of the French. Besides her other reasons for gladness, she had a dim hope, which she was conscious was half superstitious, that those new anxieties about Tito, having come with the burdensome guests, might perhaps vanish with them. The French had been in Florence hardly eleven days, but in that space she had felt more acute unhappiness than she had known in her life before. Tito had adopted the hateful armour on the day of their arrival, and though she could frame no distinct notion why their departure should remove the cause of his fear—though, when she thought of that cause, the image of the prisoner grasping him, as she had seen it in Piero's sketch, urged itself before her and excluded every other—still, when the French were gone, she would be rid of something that was strongly associated with her pain.

Wrapped in her mantle she waited under the

loggia at the top of the house, and watched for the glimpses of the troops and the royal retinue passing the bridges on their way to the Porta San Piero, that looks towards Siena and Rome. She even returned to her station when the gates had been closed, that she might feel herself vibrating with the great peal of the bells. It was dusk then, and when at last she descended into the library, she lit her lamp, with the resolution that she would overcome the agitation that had made her idle all day, and sit down to work at her copying of the catalogue. Tito had left home early in the morning, and she did not expect him yet. Before he came she intended to leave the library, and sit in the pretty saloon, with the dancing nymphs and the birds. She had done so every evening since he had objected to the library as chill and gloomy.

To her great surprise, she had not been at work long before Tito entered. Her first thought was, how cheerless he would feel the wide darkness of this great room, with one little oil-lamp burning at the farther end, and the fire nearly out. She almost ran towards him.

“Tito, dearest, I did not know you would come so soon,” she said, nervously, putting up her white arms to unwind his *becchetto*.

“I am not welcome then?” he said, with one of his brightest smiles, clasping her, but playfully holding his head back from her.

“Tito!” She uttered the word in a tone of pretty, loving reproach, and then he kissed her fondly, stroked her hair, as his manner was, and seemed not to mind about taking off his mantle yet. Romola quivered with delight. All the emotions of the day had been preparing in her a keener sensitiveness to the return of this habitual manner. “It will come back,” she was saying to herself, “the old happiness will perhaps come back. He is like himself again.”

Tito was taking great pains to be like himself; his heart was palpitating with anxiety.

“If I had expected you so soon,” said Romola, as she at last helped him to take off his wrappings, “I would have had a little festival prepared to this joyful ringing of the bells. I did not mean to be here in the library when you came home.”

“Never mind, sweet,” he said, carelessly. “Do not think about the fire. Come—come and sit down.”

There was a low stool against Tito’s chair, and that was Romola’s habitual seat when they were talking together. She rested her arm on his knee, as she used to do on her father’s, and looked up at him while he spoke. He had never yet noticed the presence of the portrait, and she had not mentioned it—thinking of it all the more.

“I have been enjoying the clang of the bells for the first time, Tito,” she began. “I like being

shaken and deafened by them: I fancied I was something like a Bacchante possessed by a divine rage. Are not the people looking very joyful to-night?"

"Joyful after a sour and pious fashion," said Tito, with a shrug. "But, in truth, those who are left behind in Florence have little cause to be joyful; it seems to me, the most reasonable ground of gladness would be to have got out of Florence."

Tito had sounded the desired key-note without any trouble, or appearance of premeditation. He spoke with no emphasis, but he looked grave enough to make Romola ask rather anxiously,

"Why, Tito? Are there fresh troubles?"

"No need of fresh ones, my Romola. There are three strong parties in the city, all ready to fly at each other's throats. And if the Frate's party is strong enough to frighten the other two into silence, as seems most likely, life will be as pleasant and amusing as a funeral. They have the plan of a Great Council simmering already; and if they get it, the man who sings sacred Lauds the loudest will be the most eligible for office. And besides that, the city will be so drained by the payment of this great subsidy to the French king, and by the war to get back Pisa, that the prospect would be dismal enough without the rule of fanatics. On the whole, Florence will be a delightful place for those worthies who entertain themselves in the evening by going into crypts

and lashing themselves; but for everything else, the exiles have the best of it. For my own part, I have been thinking seriously that we should be wise to quit Florence, my Romola."

She started. "Tito, how could we leave Florence? Surely you do not think I could leave it—at least, not yet—not for a long while." She had turned cold and trembling, and did not find it quite easy to speak. Tito must know the reasons she had in her mind.

"That is all a fabric of your own imagination, my sweet one. Your secluded life has made you lay such false stress on a few things. You know I used to tell you, before we were married, that I wished we were somewhere else than in Florence. If you had seen more places and more people, you would know what I mean when I say that there is something in the Florentines that reminds me of their cutting spring winds. I like people who take life less eagerly; and it would be good for my Romola, too, to see a new life. I should like to dip her a little in the soft waters of forgetfulness."

He leaned forward and kissed her brow, and laid his hand on her fair hair again; but she felt his caress no more than if he had kissed a mask. She was too much agitated by the sense of the distance between their minds to be conscious that his lips touched her.

"Tito, it is not because I suppose Florence is the

pleasantest place in the world that I desire not to quit it. It is because I—because we have to see my father's wish fulfilled. My godfather is old; he is seventy-one; we could not leave it to him."

"It is precisely those superstitions which hang about your mind like bedimmed clouds, my Romola, that make one great reason why I could wish we were two hundred leagues from Florence. I am obliged to take care of you in opposition to your own will: if those dear eyes, that look so tender, see falsely, I must see for them, and save my wife from wasting her life in disappointing herself by impracticable dreams."

Romola sat silent and motionless: she could not blind herself to the direction in which Tito's words pointed: he wanted to persuade her that they might get the library deposited in some monastery, or take some other ready means to rid themselves of a task, and of a tie to Florence; and she was determined never to submit her mind to his judgment on this question of duty to her father; she was inwardly prepared to encounter any sort of pain in resistance. But the determination was kept latent in these first moments by the heart-crushing sense that now at last she and Tito must be confessedly divided in their wishes. He was glad of her silence, for, much as he had feared the strength of her feeling, it was impossible for him, shut up in the narrowness that hedges in all merely clever, unimpassioned men, not to over-estimate the

persuasiveness of his own arguments. His conduct did not look ugly to himself, and his imagination did not suffice to show him exactly how it would look to Romola. He went on in the same gentle, remonstrating tone.

“You know, dearest—your own clear judgment always showed you—that the notion of isolating a collection of books and antiquities, and attaching a single name to them for ever, was one that had no valid, substantial good for its object: and yet more, one that was liable to be defeated in a thousand ways. See what has become of the Medici collections! And, for my part, I consider it even blameworthy to entertain those petty views of appropriation: why should any one be reasonably glad that Florence should possess the benefits of learned research and taste more than any other city? I understand your feeling about the wishes of the dead; but wisdom puts a limit to these sentiments, else lives might be continually wasted in that sort of futile devotion—like praising deaf gods for ever. You gave your life to your father while he lived; why should you demand more of yourself?”

“Because it was a trust,” said Romola, in a low but distinct voice. “He trusted me, he trusted you, Tito. I did not expect you to feel anything else about it—to feel as I do—but I did expect you to feel that.”

“Yes, dearest, of course I should feel it on a

point where your father's real welfare or happiness was concerned; but there is no question of that now. If we believed in purgatory, I should be as anxious as you to have masses said; and if I believed it could now pain your father to see his library preserved and used in a rather different way from what he had set his mind on, I should share the strictness of your views. But a little philosophy should teach us to rid ourselves of those air-woven fetters that mortals hang round themselves, spending their lives in misery under the mere imagination of weight. Your mind, which seizes ideas so readily, my Romola, is able to discriminate between substantial good and these brain-wrought fantasies. Ask yourself, dearest, what possible good can these books and antiquities do stowed together under your father's name in Florence, more than they would do if they were divided or carried elsewhere? Nay, is not the very dispersion of such things in hands that know how to value them one means of extending their usefulness? This rivalry of Italian cities is very petty and illiberal. The loss of Constantinople was the gain of the whole civilized world."

Romola was still too thoroughly under the painful pressure of the new revelation Tito was making of himself, for her resistance to find any strong vent. As that fluent talk fell on her ears there was a rising contempt within her, which only made her more conscious of her bruised, despairing love, her



love for the Tito she had married and believed in. Her nature, possessed with the energies of strong emotion, recoiled from this hopelessly shallow readiness which professed to appropriate the widest sympathies and had no pulse for the nearest. She still spoke like one who was restrained from showing all she felt. She had only drawn away her arm from his knee and sat with her hands clasped before her, cold and motionless as locked waters.

“You talk of substantial good, Tito! Are faithfulness, and love, and sweet grateful memories, no good? Is it no good that we should keep our silent promises on which others build because they believe in our love and truth? Is it no good that a just life should be justly honoured? Or, is it good that we should harden our hearts against all the wants and hopes of those who have depended on us? What good can belong to men who have such souls? To talk cleverly, perhaps, and find soft couches for themselves, and live and die with their base selves as their best companions.”

Her voice had gradually risen till there was a ring of scorn in the last words; she made a slight pause, but he saw there were other words quivering on her lips, and he chose to let them come.

“I know of no good for cities or the world if they are to be made up of such beings. But I am not thinking of other Italian cities and the whole civilized world—I am thinking of my father, and of

my love and sorrow for him, and of his just claims on us. I would give up anything else, Tito,—I would leave Florence,—what else did I live for but for him and you? But I will not give up that duty. What have I to do with your arguments? It was a yearning of *his* heart, and therefore it is a yearning of mine.”

Her voice, from having been tremulous, had become full and firm. She felt that she had been urged on to say all that it was needful for her to say. She thought, poor thing, there was nothing harder to come than this struggle against Tito's suggestions as against the meaner part of herself.

He had begun to see clearly that he could not persuade her into assent: he must take another course, and show her that the time for resistance was past. That, at least, would put an end to further struggle; and if the disclosure were not made by himself to-night, to-morrow it must be made in another way. That necessity nerved his courage; and his experience of her affectionateness and unexpected submissiveness, ever since their marriage until now, encouraged him to hope that, at last, she would accommodate herself to what had been his will.

“I am sorry to hear you speak in that spirit of blind persistence, my Romola,” he said, quietly, “because it obliges me to give you pain. But I partly foresaw your opposition, and as a prompt

decision was necessary, I avoided that obstacle, and decided without consulting you. The very care of a husband for his wife's interest compels him to that separate action sometimes—even when he has such a wife as you, my Romola.”

She turned her eyes on him in breathless inquiry.

“I mean,” he said, answering her look, “that I have arranged for the transfer, both of the books and antiquities, where they will find the highest use and value. The books have been bought for the Duke of Milan, the marbles and bronzes and the rest are going to France: and both will be protected by the stability of a great Power, instead of remaining in a city which is exposed to ruin.”

Before he had finished speaking, Romola had started from her seat, and stood up looking down at him, with tightened hands falling before her, and, for the first time in her life, with a flash of fierceness in her scorn and anger.

“You have *sold* them?” she asked, as if she distrusted her ears.

“I have,” said Tito, quailing a little. The scene was unpleasant—the descending scorn already scorched him.

“You are a treacherous man!” she said, with something grating in her voice, as she looked down at him.

She was silent for a minute, and he sat still, feeling that ingenuity was powerless just now. Sud-

denly she turned away, and said, in an agitated tone, "It may be hindered—I am going to my godfather."

In an instant Tito started up, went to the door, locked it, and took out the key. It was time for all the masculine predominance that was latent in him to show itself. But he was not angry; he only felt that the moment was eminently unpleasant, and that when this scene was at an end he should be glad to keep away from Romola for a little while. But it was absolutely necessary first that she should be reduced to passiveness.

"Try to calm yourself a little, Romola," he said, leaning in the easiest attitude possible against a pedestal under the bust of a grim old Roman. Not that he was inwardly easy: his heart palpitated a little with a moral dread, against which no chain-armour could be found. He had locked in his wife's anger and scorn, but he had been obliged to lock himself in with it; and his blood did not rise with contest—his olive cheek was perceptibly paled.

Romola had paused and turned her eyes on him as she saw him take his stand and lodge the key in his scarsella. Her eyes were flashing, and her whole frame seemed to be possessed by impetuous force that wanted to leap out in some deed. All the crushing pain of disappointment in her husband, which had made the strongest part of her conscious-

ness a few minutes before, was annihilated by the vehemence of her indignation. She could not care in this moment that the man she was despising as he leaned there in his loathsome beauty—she could not care that he was her husband; she could only feel that she despised him. The pride and fierceness of the old Bardi blood had been thoroughly awaked in her for the first time.

“Try at least to understand the fact,” said Tito, “and do not seek to take futile steps which may be fatal. It is of no use for you to go to your godfather. Messer Bernardo cannot reverse what I have done. Only sit down. You would hardly wish, if you were quite yourself, to make known to any third person what passes between us in private.”

Tito knew that he had touched the right fibre there. But she did not sit down; she was too unconscious of her body voluntarily to change her attitude.

“Why can it not be reversed?” she said, after a pause. “Nothing is moved yet.”

“Simply because the sale has been concluded by written agreement; the purchasers have left Florence, and I hold the bonds for the purchase-money.”

“If my father had suspected you of being a faithless man,” said Romola, in a tone of bitter scorn, which insisted on darting out before she could say

anything else, "he would have placed the library safely out of your power. But death overtook him too soon, and when you were sure his ear was deaf, and his hand stiff, you robbed him." She paused an instant, and then said, with gathered passion, "Have you robbed somebody else, who is *not* dead? Is that the reason you wear armour?"

Romola had been driven to utter the words as men are driven to use the lash of the horsewhip. At first, Tito felt horribly cowed; it seemed to him that the disgrace he had been dreading would be worse than he had imagined it. But soon there was a reaction: such power of dislike and resistance as there was within him was beginning to rise against a wife whose voice seemed like the herald of a retributive fate. Her, at least, his quick mind told him that he might master.

"It is useless," he said, coolly, "to answer the words of madness, Romola. Your peculiar feeling about your father has made you mad at this moment. Any rational person looking at the case from a due distance will see that I have taken the wisest course. Apart from the influence of your exaggerated feelings on him, I am convinced that Messer Bernardo would be of that opinion."

"He would not!" said Romola. "He lives in the hope of seeing my father's wish exactly fulfilled. We spoke of it together only yesterday. He will

help me yet. Who are these men to whom you have sold my father's property?"

"There is no reason why you should not be told, except that it signifies little. The Count di San Severino and the Seneschal de Beaucaire are now on their way with the king to Siena."

"They may be overtaken and persuaded to give up their purchase," said Romola, eagerly, her anger beginning to be surmounted by anxious thought.

"No, they may not," said Tito, with cool decision.

"Why?"

"Because I do not choose that they should."

"But if you were paid the money?—we will pay you the money," said Romola.

No words could have disclosed more fully her sense of alienation from Tito; but they were spoken with less of bitterness than of anxious pleading. And he felt stronger, for he saw that the first impulse of fury was past.

"No, my Romola. Understand that such thoughts as these are impracticable. You would not, in a reasonable moment, ask your godfather to bury three thousand florins in addition to what he has already paid on the library. I think your pride and delicacy would shrink from that."

She began to tremble and turn cold again with discouragement, and sank down on the carved chest near which she was standing. He went on in a clear voice, under which she shuddered, as if it had

been a narrow cold stream coursing over a hot cheek.

“Moreover, it is not my will that Messer Bernardo should advance the money, even if the project were not an utterly wild one. And I beg you to consider, before you take any step or utter any word on the subject, what will be the consequences of your placing yourself in opposition to me, and trying to exhibit your husband in the odious light which your own distempered feelings cast over him. What object will you serve by injuring me with Messer Bernardo? The event is irrevocable, the library is sold, and you are my wife.”

Every word was spoken for the sake of a calculated effect, for his intellect was urged into the utmost activity by the danger of the crisis. He knew that Romola's mind would take in rapidly enough all the wide meaning of his speech. He waited and watched her in silence.

She had turned her eyes from him, and was looking on the ground, and in that way she sat for several minutes. When she spoke, her voice was quite altered,—it was quiet and cold.

“I have one thing to ask.”

“Ask anything that I can do without injuring us both, Romola.”

“That you will give me that portion of the money which belongs to my godfather, and let me pay him.”



“I must have some assurance from you, first, of the attitude you intend to take towards me.”

“Do you believe in assurances, Tito?” she said, with a tinge of returning bitterness.

“From you, I do.”

“I will do you no harm. I shall disclose nothing. I will say nothing to pain him or you. You say truly, the event is irrevocable.”

“Then I will do what you desire to-morrow morning.”

“To-night, if possible,” said Romola, “that we may not speak of it again.”

“It is possible,” he said, moving towards the lamp, while she sat still, looking away from him with absent eyes.

Presently he came and bent down over her, to put a piece of paper into her hand. “You will receive something in return, you are aware, my Romola?” he said, gently, not minding so much what had passed, now he was secure; and feeling able to try and propitiate her.

“Yes,” she said, taking the paper, without looking at him, “I understand.”

“And you will forgive me, my Romola, when you have had time to reflect.” He just touched her brow with his lips, but she took no notice, and seemed really unconscious of the act.

She was aware that he unlocked the door and went out. She moved her head and listened. The

great door of the court opened and shut again. She started up as if some sudden freedom had come, and going to her father's chair where his picture was propped, fell on her knees before it, and burst into sobs.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## BALDASSARRE MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN Baldassarre was wandering about Florence in search of a spare outhouse where he might have the cheapest of sheltered beds, his steps had been attracted towards that sole portion of ground within the walls of the city which is not perfectly level, and where the spectator, lifted above the roofs of the houses, can see beyond the city to the protecting hills and far-stretching valley, otherwise shut out from his view except along the welcome opening made by the course of the Arno. Part of that ground has been already seen by us as the hill of Bogoli, at that time a great stone quarry; but the side towards which Baldassarre directed his steps was the one that sloped down behind the Via de' Bardi, and was most commonly called the hill of San Giorgio. Bratti had told him that Tito's dwelling was in the Via de' Bardi; and, after surveying that street, he turned up the slope of the hill which he had observed as he was crossing the bridge. If he could find a sheltering outhouse on that hill, he would be glad: he had now for some

years been accustomed to live with a broad sky about him ; and, moreover, the narrow passes of the streets, with their strip of sky above, and the unknown labyrinth around them, seemed to intensify his sense of loneliness and feeble memory.

The hill was sparsely inhabited, and covered chiefly by gardens ; but in one spot was a piece of rough ground jagged with great stones, which had never been cultivated since a landslip had ruined some houses there towards the end of the thirteenth century. Just above the edge of this broken ground stood a queer little square building, looking like a truncated tower roofed in with fluted tiles, and close by was a small outhouse, apparently built up against a piece of ruined stone wall. Under a large half-dead mulberry-tree that was now sending its last fluttering leaves in at the open doorways, a shrivelled, hardy old woman was untying a goat with two kids, and Baldassarre could see that part of the outbuilding was occupied by live stock ; but the door of the other part was open, and it was empty of everything but some tools and straw. It was just the sort of place he wanted. He spoke to the old woman ; but it was not till he got close to her and shouted in her ear, that he succeeded in making her understand his want of a lodging, and his readiness to pay for it. At first he could get no answer beyond shakes of the head and the words, "No—no lodging," uttered in the muffled tone of the deaf. But, by dint of per-

sistence, he made clear to her that he was a poor stranger from a long way over seas, and could not afford to go to hostelries; that he only wanted to lie on the straw in the outhouse, and would pay her a quattrino or two a week for that shelter. She still looked at him dubiously, shaking her head and talking low to herself; but presently, as if a new thought occurred to her, she fetched a hatchet from the house, and, showing him a chump that lay half covered with litter in a corner, asked him if he would chop that up for her: if he would, he might lie in the outhouse for one night. He agreed, and Monna Lisa stood with her arms akimbo to watch him, with a smile of gratified cunning, saying low to herself,

“It’s lain there ever since my old man died. What then? I might as well have put a stone on the fire. He chops very well, though he does speak with a foreign tongue, and looks odd. I couldn’t have got it done cheaper. And if he only wants a bit of straw to lie on, I might make him do an errand or two up and down the hill. Who need know? And sin that’s hidden’s half forgiven.\* He’s a stranger: he’ll take no notice of *her*. And I’ll tell her to keep her tongue still.”

The antecedent to these feminine pronouns had a pair of blue eyes, which at that moment were applied to a large round hole in the shutter of the upper

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\* “Peccato celato è mezzo perdonato.”

window. The shutter was closed, not for any penal reasons, but because only the opposite window had the luxury of glass in it: the weather was not warm, and a round hole four inches in diameter served all the purposes of observation. The hole was unfortunately a little too high, and obliged the small observer to stand on a low stool of a rickety character; but Tessa would have stood a long while in a much more inconvenient position for the sake of seeing a little variety in her life. She had been drawn to the opening at the first loud tones of the strange voice speaking to Monna Lisa; and darting gently across her room every now and then to peep at something, she continued to stand there until the wood had been chopped, and she saw Baldassarre enter the outhouse, as the dusk was gathering, and seat himself on the straw.

A great temptation had laid hold of Tessa's mind; she would go and take that old man part of her supper, and talk to him a little. He was not deaf like Monna Lisa, and besides she could say a great many things to him that it was no use to shout at Monna Lisa who knew them already. And he was a stranger—strangers came from a long way off and went away again, and lived nowhere in particular. It was naughty, she knew, for obedience made the largest part in Tessa's idea of duty; but it would be something to confess to the padre next Pasqua, and there was nothing else to confess except going to

sleep sometimes over her beads, and being a little cross with Monna Lisa because she was so deaf; for she had as much idleness as she liked now, and was never frightened into telling white lies. She turned away from her shutter with rather an excited expression in her childish face, which was as pretty and pouting as ever. Her garb was still that of a simple contadina, but of a contadina prepared for a festa: her gown of dark green serge, with its red girdle, was very clean and neat, she had the string of red glass beads round her neck, and her brown hair, rough from curliness, was duly knotted up and fastened with the silver pin. She had but one new ornament, and she was very proud of it, for it was a fine gold ring.

She sat on the low stool, nursing her knees, for a minute or two, with her little soul poised in fluttering excitement on the edge of this pleasant transgression. It was quite irresistible; she had been commanded to make no acquaintances, and warned that if she did, all her new happy lot would vanish away, and be like a hidden treasure that turned to lead as soon as it was brought to the daylight; and she had been so obedient that when she had to go to church she had kept her face shaded by her hood and had pursed up her lips quite tightly. It was true her obedience had been a little helped by her own dread lest the alarming step-father Nofri should turn up even in this quarter, so far from the Por' del Prato, and beat her at least, if

he did not drag her back to work for him. But this old man was not an acquaintance; he was a poor stranger going to sleep in the outhouse, and he probably knew nothing of step-father Nofri; and, besides, if she took him some supper, he would like her, and not want to tell anything about her. Monna Lisa would say she must not go and talk to him, therefore Monna Lisa must not be consulted. It did not signify what she found out after it had been done.

Supper was being prepared, she knew—a mountain of macaroni, flavoured with cheese, fragrant enough to tame any stranger. So she tripped downstairs with a mind full of deep designs, and first asking with an innocent look what that noise of talking had been, without waiting for an answer, knit her brow with a peremptory air, something like a kitten trying to be formidable, and sent the old woman upstairs; she chose to eat her supper down below. In three minutes Tessa with her lantern in one hand and a wooden bowl of macaroni in the other, was kicking gently at the door of the outhouse, and Baldassarre, roused from sad reverie, doubted in the first moment whether he was awake as he opened the door and saw this surprising little handmaid, with delight in her wide eyes, breaking in on his dismal loneliness.

“I’ve brought you some supper,” she said, lifting her mouth towards his ear and shouting, as if he had



been deaf like Monna Lisa. "Sit down and eat it, while I stay with you."

Surprise and distrust surmounted every other feeling in Baldassarre, but, though he had no smile or word of gratitude ready, there could not be any impulse to push away this visitant, and he sank down passively on his straw again, while Tessa placed herself close to him, put the wooden bowl on his lap, and set down the lantern in front of them, crossing her hands before her, and nodding at the bowl with a significant smile, as much as to say, "Yes, you may really eat it." For, in the excitement of carrying out her deed, she had forgotten her previous thought that the stranger would not be deaf, and had fallen into her habitual alternative of dumb show and shouting.

The invitation was not a disagreeable one, for he had been gnawing a remnant of dried bread, which had left plenty of appetite for anything warm and relishing. Tessa watched the disappearance of two or three mouthfuls without speaking, for she had thought his eyes rather fierce at first; but now she ventured to put her mouth to his ear again and cry—

"I like my supper, don't you?"

It was not a smile, but rather the milder look of a dog touched by kindness but unable to smile, that Baldassarre turned on this round blue-eyed thing that was caring about him.

"Yes," he said; "but I can hear well—I'm not deaf."

"It is true; I forgot," said Tessa, lifting her hands and clasping them. "But Monna Lisa is deaf, and I live with her. She's a kind old woman, and I'm not frightened at her. And we live very well: we have plenty of nice things. I can have nuts if I like. And I'm not obliged to work now. I used to have to work, and I didn't like it; but I liked feeding the mules, and I should like to see poor Giannetta, the little mule, again. We've only got a goat and two kids, and I used to talk to the goat a good deal, because there was nobody else but Monna Lisa. But now I've got something else—can you guess what it is?"

She drew her head back, and looked with a challenging smile at Baldassarre, as if she had proposed a difficult riddle to him.

"No," said he, putting aside his bowl, and looking at her dreamily. It seemed as if this young prattling thing were some memory come back out of his own youth.

"You like me to talk to you, don't you?" said Tessa, "but you must not tell anybody. Shall I fetch you a bit of cold sausage?"

He shook his head, but he looked so mild now that Tessa felt quite at her ease.

"Well, then, I've got a little baby. Such a pretty bambinetto, with little fingers and nails! Not old yet; it was born at the Natività, Monna Lisa says.

I was married one Natività, a long, long while ago, and nobody knew. O Santa Madonna! I didn't mean to tell you that!"

Tessa set up her shoulders and bit her lip, looking at Baldassarre as if this betrayal of secrets must have an exciting effect on him too. But he seemed not to care much; and perhaps that was in the nature of strangers.

"Yes," she said, carrying on her thought aloud, "you are a stranger; you don't live anywhere or know anybody, do you?"

"No," said Baldassarre, also thinking aloud, rather than consciously answering, "I only know one man."

"His name is not Nofri, is it?" said Tessa, anxiously.

"No," said Baldassarre, noticing her look of fear. "Is that your husband's name?"

That mistaken supposition was very amusing to Tessa. She laughed and clapped her hands as she said,—

"No, indeed! But I must not tell you anything about my husband. You would never think what he is—not at all like Nofri!"

She laughed again at the delightful incongruity between the name of Nofri—which was not separable from the idea of the cross-grained stepfather—and the idea of her husband.

"But I don't see him very often," she went on, more gravely. "And sometimes I pray to the Holy

Madonna to send him oftener, and once she did. But I must go back to my bimbo now. I'll bring it to show you to-morrow. You would like to see it. Sometimes it cries and makes a face, but only when it's hungry, Monna Lisa says. You wouldn't think it, but Monna Lisa had babies once, and they are all dead old men. My husband says she will never die now, because she's so well dried. I'm glad of that, for I'm fond of her. You would like to stay here to-morrow, shouldn't you?"

"I should like to have this place to come and rest in, that's all," said Baldassarre. "I would pay for it, and harm nobody."

"No, indeed; I think you are not a bad old man. But you look sorry about something. Tell me, is there anything you shall cry about when I leave you by yourself? *I* used to cry once."

"No, child; I think I shall cry no more."

"That's right; and I'll bring you some breakfast, and show you the bimbo. Good-night."

Tessa took up her bowl and lantern, and closed the door behind her. The pretty loving apparition had been no more to Baldassarre than a faint rainbow on the blackness to the man who is wrestling in deep waters. He hardly thought of her again till his dreamy waking passed into the more vivid images of disturbed sleep.

But Tessa thought much of him. She had no sooner entered the house than she told Monna Lisa

what she had done, and insisted that the stranger should be allowed to come and rest in the outhouse when he liked. The old woman, who had had her notions of making him a useful tenant, made a great show of reluctance, shook her head, and urged that Messer Naldo would be angry if she let any one come about the house. Tessa did not believe that. Naldo had said nothing against strangers who lived nowhere; and this old man knew nobody except one person, who was not Nofri.

“Well,” conceded Monna Lisa, at last, “if I let him stay for awhile and carry things up the hill for me, thou must keep thy counsel and tell nobody.”

“No,” said Tessa, “I’ll only tell the bimbo.”

“And then,” Monna Lisa went on, in her thick undertone, “God may love us well enough not to let Messer Naldo find out anything about it. For he never comes here but at dark; and as he was here two days ago, it’s likely he’ll never come at all till the old man’s gone away again.”

“Oh, me! Monna,” said Tessa, clasping her hands, “I wish Naldo had not to go such a long, long way sometimes before he comes back again.”

“Ah, child, the world’s big, they say. There are places behind the mountains, and if people go night and day, night and day, they get to Rome, and see the Holy Father.”

Tessa looked submissive in the presence of this mystery, and began to rock her baby, and sing

syllables of vague loving meaning, in tones that imitated a triple chime.

The next morning she was unusually industrious in the prospect of more dialogue and of the pleasure she should give the poor old stranger by showing him her baby. But before she could get ready to take Baldassarre his breakfast, she found that Monna Lisa had been employing him as a drawer of water. She deferred her paternosters, and hurried down to insist that Baldassarre should sit on his straw, so that she might come and sit by him again while he ate his breakfast. That attitude made the new companionship all the more delightful to Tessa, for she had been used to sitting on straw in old days along with her goats and mules.

“I will not let Monna Lisa give you too much work to do,” she said, bringing him some steaming broth and soft bread. “I don’t like much work, and I dare say you don’t. I like sitting in the sunshine and feeding things. Monna Lisa says work is good, but she does it all herself, so I don’t mind. She’s not a cross old woman ; you needn’t be afraid of her being cross. And now, you eat that, and I’ll go and fetch my baby and show it you.”

Presently she came back with the small mummy-case in her arms. The mummy looked very lively, having unusually large dark eyes, though no more than the usual indication of a future nose.

“This is my baby,” said Tessa, seating herself

close to Baldassarre. "You didn't think it was so pretty, did you? It is like the little Gesù, and I should think the Santa Madonna would be kinder to me now, is it not true? But I have not much to ask for, because I have everything now—only that I should see my husband oftener. You may hold the bambino a little if you like, but I think you must not kiss him, because you might hurt him."

She spoke this prohibition in a tone of soothing excuse, and Baldassarre could not refuse to hold the small package. "Poor thing! poor thing!" he said, in a deep voice which had something strangely threatening in its apparent pity. It did not seem to him as if this guileless loving little woman could reconcile him to the world at all, but rather that she was with him against the world, that she was a creature who would need to be avenged.

"Oh, don't you be sorry for me," she said; "for though I don't see him often, he is more beautiful and good than anybody else in the world. I say prayers to him when he's away. You couldn't think what he is!"

She looked at Baldassarre with a wide glance of mysterious meaning, taking the baby from him again, and almost wishing he would question her as if he wanted very much to know more.

"Yes, I could," said Baldassarre, rather bitterly.

"No, I'm sure you never could," said Tessa, earnestly. "You thought he might be Nofri," she

added, with a triumphant air of conclusiveness. "But never mind; you couldn't know. What is your name?"

He rubbed his hand over his knitted brow, then looked at her blankly and said, "Ah, child, what is it?"

It was not that he did not often remember his name well enough; and if he had had presence of mind now to remember it, he would have chosen not to tell it. But a sudden question appealing to his memory, had a paralyzing effect, and in that moment he was conscious of nothing but helplessness.

Ignorant as Tessa was, the pity stirred in her by his blank look taught her to say,

"Never mind: you are a stranger, it is no matter about your having a name. Good-by now, because I want my breakfast. You will come here and rest when you like; Monna Lisa says you may. And don't you be unhappy, for we'll be good to you."

"Poor thing!" said Baldassarre again.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE.

MESSER NALDO came again sooner than was expected : he came on the evening of the twenty-eighth of November, only eleven days after his previous visit, proving that he had not gone far beyond the mountains ; and a scene which we have witnessed as it took place that evening in the Via de' Bardi may help to explain the impulse which turned his steps towards the hill of San Giorgio.

When Tito had first found this home for Tessa, on his return from Rome, more than a year and a half ago, he had acted, he persuaded himself, simply under the constraint imposed on him by his own kindness after the unlucky incident which had made foolish little Tessa imagine him to be her husband. It was true that the kindness was manifested towards a pretty trusting thing whom it was impossible to be near without feeling inclined to caress and pet her ; but it was not less true that Tito had movements of kindness towards her apart from any contemplated gain to himself. Otherwise,

charming as her prettiness and prattle were in a lazy moment, he might have preferred to be free from her; for he was not in love with Tessa—he was in love for the first time in his life with an entirely different woman, whom he was not simply inclined to shower caresses on, but whose presence possessed him so that the simple sweep of her long tresses across his cheek seemed to vibrate through the hours. All the young ideal passion he had in him had been stirred by Romola, and his fibre was too fine, his intellect too bright, for him to be tempted into the habits of a gross pleasure-seeker. But he had spun a web about himself and Tessa, which he felt incapable of breaking: in the first moments after the mimic marriage he had been prompted to leave her under an illusion by a distinct calculation of his own possible need, but since that critical moment it seemed to him that the web had gone on spinning itself in spite of him, like a growth over which he had no power. The elements of kindness and self-indulgence are hard to distinguish in a soft nature like Tito's; and the annoyance he had felt under Tessa's pursuit of him on the day of his betrothal, the thorough intention of revealing the truth to her with which he set out to fulfil his promise of seeing her again, were a sufficiently strong argument to him that in ultimately leaving Tessa under her illusion and providing a home for her, he had been overcome by his own kindness. And in these days

of his first devotion to Romola he needed a self-justifying argument. He had learned to be glad that she was deceived about some things. But every strong feeling makes to itself a conscience of its own—has its own piety; just as much as the feeling of the son towards the mother, which will sometimes survive amid the worst fumes of depravation; and Tito could not yet be easy in committing a secret offence against his wedded love.

But he was all the more careful in taking precautions to preserve the secrecy of the offence. Monna Lisa, who, like many of her class, never left her habitation except to go to one or two particular shops, and to confession once a year, knew nothing of his real name and whereabouts: she only knew that he paid her so as to make her very comfortable, and minded little about the rest, save that she got fond of Tessa, and liked the cares for which she was paid. There was some mystery behind, clearly, since Tessa was a contadina, and Messer Naldo was a signor; but, for aught Monna Lisa knew, he might be a real husband. For Tito had thoroughly frightened Tessa into silence about the circumstances of their marriage, by telling her that if she broke that silence she would never see him again; and Monna Lisa's deafness, which made it impossible to say anything to her without some premeditation, had saved Tessa from any incautious revelation to her, such as had run off her tongue in

talking with Baldassarre. And for a long while Tito's visits were so rare, that it seemed likely enough he took journeys between them. They were prompted chiefly by the desire to see that all things were going on well with Tessa; and though he always found his visit pleasanter than the prospect of it—always felt anew the charm of that pretty ignorant lovingness and trust—he had not yet any real need of it. But he was determined, if possible, to preserve the simplicity on which the charm depended; to keep Tessa a genuine contadina, and not place the small field-flower among conditions that would rob it of its grace. He would have been shocked to see her in the dress of any other rank than her own; the piquancy of her talk would be all gone if things began to have new relations for her, if her world became wider, her pleasures less childish; and the squirrel-like enjoyment of nuts at discretion marked the standard of the luxuries he provided for her. By this means, Tito saved Tessa's charm from being sullied; and he also, by a convenient coincidence, saved himself from aggravating expenses that were already rather importunate to a man whose money was all required for his avowed habits of life.

This, in brief, had been the history of Tito's relation to Tessa up to a very recent date. It is true that once or twice before Bardo's death, the sense that there was Tessa up the hill, with whom

it was possible to pass an hour agreeably, had been an inducement to him to escape from a little weariness of the old man, when, for lack of any positive engagement, he might otherwise have borne the weariness patiently and shared Romola's burden. But the moment when he had first felt a real hunger for Tessa's ignorant lovingness and belief in him had not come till quite lately, and it was distinctly marked out by circumstances as little to be forgotten as the oncoming of a malady that has permanently vitiated the sight and hearing. It was the day when he had first seen Baldassarre, and had bought the armour. Returning across the bridge that night, with the coat of mail in his hands, he had felt an unconquerable shrinking from an immediate encounter with Romola. She, too, knew little of the actual world; she, too, trusted him; but he had an uneasy consciousness that behind her frank eyes there was a nature that could judge him, and that any ill-founded trust of hers sprang not from pretty brute-like incapacity, but from a nobleness which might prove an alarming touchstone. He wanted a little ease, a little repose from self-control, after the agitation and exertions of the day; he wanted to be where he could adjust his mind to the morrow, without caring how he behaved at the present moment. And there was a sweet adoring creature within reach whose presence was as safe and unconstraining as that of her own kids,—who would

believe any fable, and remain quite unimpressed by public opinion. And so on that evening when Romola was waiting and listening for him, he turned his steps up the hill.

No wonder, then, that the steps took the same course on this evening, eleven days later, when he had had to recoil under Romola's first outburst of scorn. He could not wish Tessa in his wife's place, or refrain from wishing that his wife should be thoroughly reconciled to him; for it was Romola, and not Tessa, that belonged to the world where all the larger desires of a man who had ambition and effective faculties must necessarily lie. But he wanted a refuge from a standard disagreeably rigorous, of which he could not make himself independent simply by thinking it folly; and Tessa's little soul was that inviting refuge.

It was not much more than eight o'clock when he went up the stone steps to the door of Tessa's room. Usually she heard his entrance into the house, and ran to meet him, but not to-night; and when he opened the door he saw the reason. A single dim light was burning above the dying fire, and showed Tessa in a kneeling attitude by the head of the bed where the baby lay. Her head had fallen aside on the pillow, and her brown rosary, which usually hung above the pillow over the picture of the Madonna and the golden palm branches, lay in the loose grasp of her right hand. She had gone

fast asleep over her beads. Tito stepped lightly across the little room, and sat down close to her. She had probably heard the opening of the door as part of her dream, for he had not been looking at her two moments before she opened her eyes. She opened them without any start, and remained quite motionless looking at him, as if the sense that he was there smiling at her shut out any impulse which could disturb that happy passiveness. But when he put his hand under her chin, and stooped to kiss her, she said:—

“I dreamed it, and then I said it was dreaming—and then I awoke, and it was true.”

“Little sinner!” said Tito, pinching her chin, “you have not said half your prayers. I will punish you by not looking at your baby; it is ugly.”

Tessa did not like those words, even though Tito was smiling. She had some pouting distress in her face, as she said, bending anxiously over the baby,

“Ah, it is not true! He is prettier than anything. You do not think he is ugly. You will look at him. He is even prettier than when you saw him before—only he’s asleep, and you can’t see his eyes or his tongue, and I can’t show you his hair—and it grows—*isn’t that wonderful?* Look at him! It’s true his face is very much all alike when he’s asleep, there is not so much to see as when he’s awake. If you kiss him very gently, he won’t wake: you want to kiss him, is it not true?”

He satisfied her by giving the small mummy a butterfly kiss, and then putting his hand on her shoulder and turning her face towards him, said, "You like looking at the baby better than looking at your husband, you false one!"

She was still kneeling, and now rested her hands on his knee, looking up at him like one of Fra Lippo Lippi's round-cheeked adoring angels.

"No," she said, shaking her head; "I love you always best, only I want you to look at the bambino and love him; I used only to want you to love me."

"And did you expect me to come again so soon?" said Tito, inclined to make her prattle. He still felt the effects of the agitation he had undergone, still felt like a man who has been violently jarred, and this was the easiest relief from silence and solitude.

"Ah, no," said Tessa, "I have counted the days—to-day I began at my right thumb again—since you put on the beautiful chain coat, that Messer San Michele gave you to take care of you on your journey. And you have got it on now," she said, peeping through the opening in the breast of his tunic. "Perhaps it made you come back sooner."

"Perhaps it did, Tessa," he said. "But don't mind the coat now. Tell me what has happened since I was here. Did you see the tents in the Prato, and the soldiers and horsemen when they passed the bridges—did you hear the drums and trumpets?"

"Yes, and I was rather frightened, because I



thought the soldiers might come up here. And Monna Lisa was a little afraid too, for she said they might carry our kids off; she said it was their business to do mischief. But the Holy Madonna took care of us, for we never saw one of them up here. But something has happened, only I hardly dare tell you, and that is what I was saying more Aves for."

"What do you mean, Tessa?" said Tito, rather anxiously. "Make haste and tell me."

"Yes, but will you let me sit on your knee? because then I think I shall not be so frightened."

He took her on his knee, and put his arm round her, but looked grave: it seemed that something unpleasant must pursue him even here.

"At first, I didn't mean to tell you," said Tessa, speaking almost in a whisper, as if that would mitigate the offence; "because we thought the old man would be gone away before you came again, and it would be as if it had not been. But now he is there, and you are come, and I never did anything you told me not to do before. And I want to tell you, and then you will perhaps forgive me, for it is a long while before I go to confession."

"Yes, tell me everything, my Tessa." He began to hope it was after all a trivial matter.

"Oh, you will be sorry for him: I'm afraid he cries about something when I don't see him. But that was not the reason I went to him first; it was because I wanted to talk to him and show him my

baby, and he was a stranger that lived nowhere, and I thought you wouldn't care so much about my talking to him. And I think he is not a bad old man, and he wanted to come and sleep on the straw next to the goats, and I made Monna Lisa say, 'Yes, he might,' and he's away all the day almost, but when he comes back, I talk to him, and take him something to eat."

"Some beggar, I suppose. It was naughty of you, Tessa, and I am angry with Monna Lisa. I must have him sent away."

"No, I think he is not a beggar, for he wanted to pay Monna Lisa, only she asked him to do work for her instead. And he gets himself shaved, and his clothes are tidy: Monna Lisa says he is a decent man. But sometimes I think he is not in his right mind: Lupo, at Peretola, was not in his right mind, and he looks a little like Lupo sometimes, as if he didn't know where he was."

"What sort of face has he?" said Tito, his heart beginning to beat strangely. He was so haunted by the thought of Baldassarre, that it was already he whom he saw in imagination sitting on the straw not many yards from him. "Fetch your stool, my Tessa, and sit on it."

"Shall you not forgive me?" she said, timidly, moving from his knee.

"Yes, I will not be angry—only sit down, and tell me what sort of old man this is."

"I can't think how to tell you: he is not like my

stepfather Nofri, or anybody. His face is yellow, and he has deep marks in it; and his hair is white, but there is none on the top of his head: and his eyebrows are black, and he looks from under them at me, and says, 'Poor thing!' to me, as if he thought I was beaten as I used to be; and that seems as if he couldn't be in his right mind, doesn't it? And I asked him his name once, but he couldn't tell it me: yet everybody has a name—is it not true? And he has a book now, and keeps looking at it ever so long, as if he were a padre. But I think he is not saying prayers, for his lips never move;—ah, you are angry with me, or is it because you are sorry for the old man?"

Tito's eyes were still fixed on Tessa; but he had ceased to see her, and was only seeing the objects her words suggested. It was this absent glance which frightened her, and she could not help going to kneel at his side again. But he did not heed her, and she dared not touch him, or speak to him: she knelt, trembling and wondering; and this state of mind suggesting her beads to her, she took them from the floor, and began to tell them again, her pretty lips moving silently, and her blue eyes wide with anxiety and struggling tears.

Tito was quite unconscious of her movements—unconscious of his own attitude: he was in that wrapt state in which a man will grasp painful roughness, and press, and press it closer, and never feel it. A

new possibility had risen before him, which might dissolve at once the wretched conditions of fear and suppression that were marring his life. Destiny had brought within his reach an opportunity of retrieving that moment on the steps of the Duomo, when the Past had grasped him with living quivering hands, and he had disowned it. A few steps, and he might be face to face with his father, with no witness by; he might seek forgiveness and reconciliation; and there was money now, from the sale of the library, to enable them to leave Florence without disclosure, and go into Southern Italy, where, under the probable French rule, he had already laid a foundation for patronage. Romola need never know the whole truth, for she could have no certain means of identifying that prisoner in the Duomo with Baldassarre, or of learning what had taken place on the steps, except from Baldassarre himself; and if his father forgave, he would also consent to bury, that offence.

But with this possibility of relief, by an easy spring, from present evil, there rose the other possibility, that the fierce-hearted man might refuse to be propitiated. Well—and if he did, things would only be as they had been before; for there would be *no witness by*. It was not repentance with a white sheet round it and taper in hand, confessing its hated sin in the eyes of men, that Tito was preparing for: it was a repentance that would make all things pleasant again, and keep all past unpleasant

things secret. And Tito's soft-heartedness, his indisposition to feel himself in harsh relations with any creature, was in strong activity towards his father, now his father was brought near to him. It would be a state of ease that his nature could not but desire, if that poisonous hatred in Baldassarre's glance could be replaced by something of the old affection and complacency.

Tito longed to have his world once again completely cushioned with good-will, and longed for it the more eagerly because of what he had just suffered from the collision with Romola. It was not difficult to him to smile pleadingly on those whom he had injured, and offer to do them much kindness: and no quickness of intellect could tell him exactly the taste of that honey on the lips of the injured. The opportunity was there, and it raised an inclination which hemmed in the calculating activity of his thought. He started up, and stepped towards the door; but Tessa's cry, as she dropped her beads, roused him from his absorption. He turned and said,

“My Tessa, get me a lantern; and don't cry, little pigeon, I am not angry.”

They went down the stairs, and Tessa was going to shout the need of the lantern in Monna Lisa's ear, when Tito, who had opened the door, said, “Stay, Tessa—no, I want no lantern: go upstairs again, and keep quiet, and say nothing to Monna Lisa.”

In half a minute he stood before the closed door of the outhouse, where the moon was shining white on the old paintless wood.

In this last decisive moment, Tito felt a tremor upon him—a sudden instinctive shrinking from a possible tiger-glance, a possible tiger-leap. Yet why should he, a young man, be afraid of an old one? a young man with armour on, of an old man without a weapon? It was but a moment's hesitation, and Tito laid his hand on the door. Was his father asleep? Was there nothing else but the door that screened him from the voice and the glance which no magic could turn into ease?

Baldassarre was not asleep. There was a square opening high in the wall of the hovel, through which the moonbeams sent in a stream of pale light; and if Tito could have looked through the opening, he would have seen his father seated on the straw, with something that shone like a white star in his hand. Baldassarre was feeling the edge of his poniard, taking refuge in that sensation from a hopeless blank of thought that seemed to lie like a great gulf between his passion and its aim.

He was in one of his most wretched moments of conscious helplessness: he had been poring, while it was light, over the book that lay open beside him; then he had been trying to recall the names of his jewels, and the symbols engraved on them; and though at certain other times he had recovered some

of those names and symbols, to-night they were all gone into darkness. And this effort at inward seeing had seemed to end in utter paralysis of memory. He was reduced to a sort of mad consciousness that he was a solitary pulse of just rage in a world filled with defying baseness. He had clutched and unsheathed his dagger, and for a long while had been feeling its edge, his mind narrowed to one image, and the dream of one sensation—the sensation of plunging that dagger into a base heart, which he was unable to pierce in any other way.

Tito had his hand on the door and was pulling it: it dragged against the ground as such old doors often do, and Baldassarre, startled out of his dream-like state, rose from his sitting posture in vague amazement, not knowing where he was. He had not yet risen to his feet, and was still kneeling on one knee, when the door came wide open and he saw, dark against the moonlight, with the rays falling on one bright mass of curls and one rounded olive cheek, the image of his reverie—not shadowy—close and real like water at the lips after the thirsty dream of it. No thought could come athwart that eager thirst. In one moment, before Tito could start back, the old man, with the preternatural force of rage in his limbs, had sprung forward and the dagger had flashed out. In the next moment the dagger had snapped in two, and Baldassarre, under the parrying force of Tito's arm, had fallen back on the straw,

clutching the hilt with its bit of broken blade. The pointed end lay shining against Tito's feet.

Tito had felt one great heart-leap of terror as he had staggered under the weight of the thrust: he felt now the triumph of deliverance and safety. His armour had been proved, and vengeance lay helpless before him. But the triumph raised no devilish impulse; on the contrary the sight of his father close to him and unable to injure him, made the effort at reconciliation easier. He was free from fear, but he had only the more unmixed and direct want to be free from the sense that he was hated. After they had looked at each other a little while, Baldassarre lying motionless in despairing rage, Tito said in his soft tones, just as they had sounded before the last parting on the shores of Greece,

“*Padre mio!*” There was a pause after those words, but no movement or sound till he said,—

“I came to ask your forgiveness!”

Again he paused, that the healing balm of those words might have time to work. But there was no sign of change in Baldassarre: he lay as he had fallen, leaning on one arm: he was trembling, but it was from the shock that had thrown him down.

“I was taken by surprise that morning. I wish now to be a son to you again. I wish to make the rest of your life happy, that you may forget what you have suffered.”

He paused again. He had used the clearest and



strongest words he could think of. It was useless to say more, until he had some sign that Baldassarre understood him. Perhaps his mind was too dis-tempered or too imbecile even for that : perhaps the shock of his fall and his disappointed rage might have quite suspended the use of his faculties.

Presently Baldassarre began to move. He threw away the broken dagger, and slowly and gradually, still trembling, began to raise himself from the ground. Tito put out his hand to help him, and so strangely quick are men's souls that in this moment when he began to feel his atonement was accepted, he had a darting thought of the irksome efforts it entailed. Baldassarre clutched the hand that was held out, raised himself and clutched it still, going close up to Tito till their faces were not a foot off each other. Then he began to speak, in a deep trembling voice,

“I saved you—I nurtured you—I loved you. You forsook me—you robbed me—you denied me. What can you give me? You have made the world bitterness to me; but there is one draught of sweetness left—that you shall know agony.”

He let fall Tito's hand, and going backwards a little, first rested his arm on a projecting stone in the wall, and then sank again in a sitting posture on the straw. The outleap of fury in the dagger-thrust had evidently exhausted him.

Tito stood silent. If it had been a deep yearning

emotion which had brought him to ask his father's forgiveness, the denial of it might have caused him a pang which would have excluded the rushing train of thought that followed those decisive words. As it was, though the sentence of unchangeable hatred grated on him and jarred him terribly, his mind glanced round with a self-preserving instinct to see how far those words could have the force of a substantial threat. When he had come down to speak to Baldassarre, he had said to himself that if his effort at reconciliation failed, things would only be as they had been before. The first glance of his mind was backward to that thought again, but the future possibilities of danger that were conjured up along with it brought the perception that things were *not* as they had been before, and the perception came as a triumphant relief. There was not only the broken dagger, there was the certainty from what Tessa had told him, that Baldassarre's mind was broken too, and had no edge that could reach him. Tito felt he had no choice now: he must defy Baldassarre as a mad, imbecile old man; and the chances were so strongly on his side that there was hardly room for fear. No; except the fear of having to do many unpleasant things in order to save himself from what was yet more unpleasant. And one of those unpleasant things must be done immediately: it was very difficult.

“Do you mean to stay here?” he said.

“No,” said Baldassarre, bitterly, “you mean to turn me out.”

“Not so,” said Tito. “I only ask.”

“I tell you, you have turned me out. If it is your straw, you turned me off it three years ago.”

“Then you mean to leave this place?” said Tito, more anxious about this certainty than the ground of it.

“I have spoken,” said Baldassarre.

Tito turned and re-entered the house. Monna Lisa was nodding: he went up to Tessa, and found her crying by the side of her baby.

“Tessa,” he said, sitting down, and taking her head between his hands. “Leave off crying, little goose, and listen to me.”

He lifted her chin upward, that she might look at him, while he spoke very distinctly and emphatically.

“You must never speak to that old man again. He is a mad old man, and he wants to kill me. Never speak to him or listen to him again.”

Tessa’s tears had ceased, and her lips were pale with fright.

“Is he gone away?” she whispered.

“He will go away. Remember what I have said to you.”

“Yes; I will never speak to a stranger any more,” said Tessa, with a sense of guilt.

He told her, to comfort her, that he would come again to-morrow; and then went down to Monna

Lisa to rebuke her severely for letting a dangerous man come about the house.

Tito felt that these were odious tasks; they were very evil-tasted morsels, but they were forced upon him. He heard Monna Lisa fasten the door behind him, and turned away, without looking towards the open door of the hovel. He felt secure that Baldassarre would go, and he could not wait to see him go. Even *his* young frame and elastic spirit were shattered by the agitations that had been crowded into this single evening.

Baldassarre was still sitting on the straw when the shadow of Tito passed by. Before him lay the fragments of the broken dagger; beside him lay the open book, over which he had pored in vain. They looked like mocking symbols of his utter helplessness; and his body was still too trembling for him to rise and walk away.

But the next morning very early, when Tessa peeped anxiously through the hole in her shutter, the door of the hovel was open, and the strange old man was gone.

## CHAPTER XV.

## WHAT FLORENCE WAS THINKING OF.

FOR several days Tito saw little of Romola. He told her gently, the next morning, that it would be better for her to remove any small articles of her own from the library, as there would be agents coming to pack up the antiquities. Then, leaning to kiss her on the brow, he suggested that she should keep in her own room where the little painted tabernacle was, and where she was then sitting, so that she might be away from the noise of strange footsteps. Romola assented quietly, making no sign of emotion: the night had been one long waking to her, and, in spite of her healthy frame, sensation had become a dull continuous pain, as if she had been stunned and bruised. Tito divined that she felt ill, but he dared say no more; he only dared, perceiving that her hand and brow were stone cold, to fetch a furred mantle and throw it lightly round her. And in every brief interval that he returned to her, the scene was nearly the same: he tried to propitiate her by some unobtrusive act or word of tenderness, and she seemed to have

lost the power of speaking to him, or of looking at him. "Patience!" he said to himself. "She will recover it, and forgive at last. The tie to me must still remain the strongest." When the stricken person is slow to recover and look as if nothing had happened, the striker easily glides into the position of the aggrieved party; he feels no bruise himself, and is strongly conscious of his own amiable behaviour since he inflicted the blow. But Tito was not naturally disposed to feel himself aggrieved; the constant bent of his mind was towards propitiation, and he would have submitted to much for the sake of feeling Romola's hand resting on his head again, as it did that morning when he first shrank from looking at her.

But he found it the less difficult to wait patiently for the return of his home happiness because his life out of doors was more and more interesting to him. A course of action which is in strictness a slowly-prepared out-growth of the entire character, is yet almost always traceable to a single impression as its point of apparent origin; and since that moment in the Piazza del Duomo, when Tito, mounted on the bales, had tasted a keen pleasure in the consciousness of his ability to tickle the ears of men with any phrases that pleased them, his imagination had glanced continually towards a sort of political activity which the troubled public life of Florence was likely enough to find occasion for. But the fresh dread of Baldassarre,

waked in the same moment, had lain like an immovable rocky obstruction across that path, and had urged him into the sale of the library, as a preparation for the possible necessity of leaving Florence, at the very time when he was beginning to feel that it had a new attraction for him. That dread was nearly removed now: he must wear his armour still, he must prepare himself for possible demands on his coolness and ingenuity, but he did not feel obliged to take the inconvenient step of leaving Florence and seeking new fortunes. His father had refused the offered atonement—had forced him into defiance; and an old man in a strange place with his memory gone, was weak enough to be defied.

Tito's implicit desires were working themselves out now in very explicit thoughts. As the freshness of young passion faded, life was taking more and more decidedly for him the aspect of a game in which there was an agreeable mingling of skill and chance.

And the game that might be played in Florence promised to be rapid and exciting; it was a game of revolutionary and party struggle, sure to include plenty of that unavowed action in which brilliant ingenuity, able to get rid of all inconvenient beliefs except that "ginger is hot in the mouth," is apt to see the path of superior wisdom.

No sooner were the French guests gone than Florence was as agitated as a colony of ants when an alarming shadow has been removed, and the camp

has to be repaired. "How are we to raise the money for the French king? How are we to manage the war with those obstinate Pisan rebels? Above all, how are we to mend our plan of government, so as to hit on the best way of getting our magistrates chosen and our laws voted?" Till those questions were well answered trade was in danger of standing still, and that large body of the working men who were not counted as citizens and had not so much as a vote to serve as an anodyne to their stomachs were likely to get impatient. Something must be done.

And first the great bell was sounded, to call the citizens to a parliament in the Piazza de' Signori; and when the crowd was wedged close, and hemmed in by armed men at all the outlets, the Signoria (or Gonfaloniere and eight Priors for the time being) came out and stood by the stone lion on the platform in front of the Old Palace, and proposed that twenty chief men of the city should have dictatorial authority given them, by force of which they should for one year choose all magistrates, and set the frame of government in order. And the people shouted their assent, and felt themselves the electors of the Twenty. This kind of "parliament" was a very old Florentine fashion, by which the will of the few was made to seem the choice of the many.

The shouting in the Piazza was soon at an end, but not so the debating inside the palace: was Florence



to have a Great Council after the Venetian mode, where all the officers of government might be elected, and all laws voted by a wide number of citizens of a certain age and of ascertained qualifications, without question of rank or party? or, was it to be governed on a narrower and less popular scheme, in which the hereditary influence of good families would be less adulterated with the votes of shopkeepers? Doctors of law disputed day after day, and far on into the night; Messer Pagolantonio Soderini alleged excellent reasons on the side of the popular scheme; Messer Guidantonio Vespucci alleged reasons equally excellent on the side of a more aristocratic form. It was a question of boiled or roast, which had been prejudged by the palates of the disputants, and the excellent arguing might have been protracted a long while without any other result than that of deferring the cooking. The majority of the men inside the palace, having power already in their hands, agreed with Vespucci, and thought change should be moderate; the majority outside the palace, conscious of little power and many grievances, were less afraid of change.

And there was a force outside the palace which was gradually tending to give the vague desires of that majority the character of a determinate will. That force was the preaching of Savonarola. Impelled partly by the spiritual necessity that was laid upon him to guide the people, and partly by the

prompting of public men who could get no measures carried without his aid, he was rapidly passing in his daily sermons from the general to the special—from telling his hearers that they must postpone their private passions and interests to the public good, to telling them precisely what sort of government they must have in order to promote that good—from “Choose whatever is best for all” to “Choose the Great Council,” and “the Great Council is the will of God.”

To Savonarola these were as good as identical propositions. The Great Council was the only practicable plan for giving an expression to the public will large enough to counteract the vitiating influence of party interests; it was a plan that would make honest impartial public action at least possible. And the purer the government of Florence could become—the more secure from the designs of men who saw their own advantage in the moral debasement of their fellows—the nearer would the Florentine people approach the character of a pure community, worthy to lead the way in the renovation of the Church and the world. And Fra Girolamo’s mind never stopped short of that sublimest end: the objects towards which he felt himself working had always the same moral magnificence. He had no private malice, he sought no petty gratification. Even in the last terrible days, when ignominy, torture, and the fear of torture, had laid bare every hidden weakness of

his soul, 'he could say to his importunate judges "Do not wonder if it seems to you that I have told but few things; for my purposes were few and great."\*

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\* "Se vi pare che io abbia detto poche cose, non ve ne maravigliate, perchè le mie cose erano poche e grandi."

## CHAPTER XVI.

## ARIADNE DISCROWNS HERSELF.

It was more than three weeks before the contents of the library were all packed and carried away. And Romola, instead of shutting her eyes and ears, had watched the process. The exhaustion consequent on violent emotion is apt to bring a dreamy disbelief in the reality of its cause; and in the evening, when the workmen were gone, Romola took her hand-lamp, and walked slowly round amongst the confusion of straw and wooden cases, pausing at every vacant pedestal, every well-known object laid prostrate, with a sort of bitter desire to assure herself that there was a sufficient reason why her love was gone and the world was barren for her. And still, as the evenings came, she went and went again; no longer to assure herself, but because this vivifying of pain and despair about her father's memory was the strongest life left to her affections. And on the 23rd of December, she knew that the last packages were going. She ran to the loggia at the top of the house that she might not

lose the last pang of seeing the slow wheels move across the bridge.

It was a cloudy day, and nearing dusk. Arno ran dark and shivering; the hills were mournful; and Florence with its girdling stone towers had that silent, tomb-like look, which unbroken shadow gives to a city seen from above. Santa Croce, where her father lay, was dark amidst that darkness, and slowly crawling over the bridge, and slowly vanishing up the narrow street, was the white load, like a cruel, deliberate Fate carrying away her father's life-long hope to bury it in an unmarked grave. Romola felt less that she was seeing this herself than that her father was conscious of it as he lay helpless under the imprisoning stones, where her hand could not reach his to tell him that he was not alone.

She stood still even after the load had disappeared, heedless of the cold, and soothed by the gloom which seemed to cover her like a mourning garment and shut out the discord of joy. When suddenly the great bell in the palace tower rang out a mighty peal: not the hammer-sound of alarm, but an agitated peal of triumph; and one after another every other bell in every other tower seemed to catch the vibration and join the chorus. And as the chorus swelled and swelled till the air seemed made of sound; little flames, vibrating too, as if the sound had caught fire, burst out between the turrets of the palace and on the girdling towers.

That sudden clang, that leaping light, fell on Romola like sharp wounds. They were the triumph of demons at the success of her husband's treachery, and the desolation of her life. Little more than three weeks ago she had been intoxicated with the sound of those very bells ; and in the gladness of Florence she had heard a prophecy of her own gladness. But now the general joy seemed cruel to her ; she stood aloof from that common life—that Florence which was flinging out its loud exultation to stun the ears of sorrow and loneliness. She could never join hands with gladness again, but only with those whom it was in the hard nature of gladness to forget. And in her bitterness she felt that all rejoicing was mockery. Men shouted pæans with their souls full of heaviness, and then looked in their neighbours' faces to see if there was really such a thing as joy. Romola had lost her belief in the happiness she had once thirsted for : it was a hateful, smiling, soft-handed thing, with a narrow, selfish heart.

She ran down from the loggia, with her hands pressed against her ears, and was hurrying across the ante-chamber, when she was startled by unexpectedly meeting her husband, who was coming to seek her.

His step was elastic, and there was a radiance of satisfaction about him not quite usual.

“What ! the noise was a little too much for you ?” he said ; for Romola, as she started at the sight of

him, had pressed her hands all the closer against her ears. He took her gently by the wrist, and drew her arm within his, leading her into the saloon surrounded with the dancing nymphs and fauns, and then went on speaking: "Florence is gone quite mad at getting its Great Council, which is to put an end to all the evils under the sun; especially to the vice of merriment. You may well look stunned, my Romola, and you are cold. You must not stay so late under that windy loggia without wrappings. I was coming to tell you that I am suddenly called to Rome about some learned business for Bernardo Rucellai. I am going away immediately, for I am to join my party at San Gaggio to-night, that we may start early in the morning. I need give you no trouble; I have had my packages made already. It will not be very long before I am back again."

He knew he had nothing to expect from her but quiet endurance of what he said and did. He could not even venture to kiss her brow this evening, but just pressed her hand to his lips, and left her. Tito felt that Romola was a more unforgiving woman than he had imagined; her love was not that sweet clinging instinct, stronger than all judgments, which, he began to see now, made the great charm of a wife. Still, this petrified coldness was better than a passionate, futile opposition. Her pride and capability of seeing where resistance was useless had their convenience.

But when the door had closed on Tito, Romola lost the look of cold immobility which came over her like an inevitable frost whenever he approached her. Inwardly she was very far from being in a state of quiet endurance, and the days that had passed since the scene which had divided her from Tito had been days of active planning and preparation for the fulfilment of a purpose.

The first thing she did now was to call old Maso to her.

“Maso,” she said, in a decided tone, “we take our journey to-morrow morning. We shall be able now to overtake that first convoy of cloth, while they are waiting at San Piero. See about the two mules to-night, and be ready to set off with them at break of day, and wait for me at Trespiano.”

She meant to take Maso with her as far as Bologna, and then send him back with letters to her godfather and Tito, telling them that she was gone and never meant to return. She had planned her departure so that its secrecy might be perfect, and her broken love and life be hidden away unscanned by vulgar eyes. Bernardo del Nero had been absent at his villa, willing to escape from political suspicions to his favourite occupation of attending to his land, and she had paid him the debt without a personal interview. He did not even know that the library was sold, and was left to conjecture that some sudden piece of good fortune had enabled Tito to raise this



sum of money. Maso had been taken into her confidence only so far that he knew her intended journey was a secret; and to do just what she told him was the thing he cared most for in his withered wintry age.

Romola did not mean to go to bed that night. When she had fastened the door she took her taper to the carved and painted chest which contained her wedding-clothes. The white silk and gold lay there, the long white veil and the circlet of pearls. A great sob rose as she looked at them: they seemed the shroud of her dead happiness. In a tiny gold loop of the circlet a sugar-plumb had lodged—a pink hailstone from the shower of sweets: Tito had detected it first, and had said that it should always remain there. At certain moments—and this was one of them—Romola was carried, by a sudden wave of memory, back again into the time of perfect trust, and felt again the presence of the husband whose love made the world as fresh and wonderful to her as to a little child that sits in stillness among the sunny flowers: heard the gentle tones and saw the soft eyes without any lie in them, and breathed over again that large freedom of the soul which comes from the faith that the being who is nearest to us is greater than ourselves. And in those brief moments the tears always rose: the woman's lovingness felt something akin to what the bereaved mother feels when the tiny fingers seem to lie warm on her bosom, and

yet are marble to her lips as she bends over the silent bed.

But there was something else lying in the chest besides the wedding-clothes: it was something dark and coarse, rolled up in a close bundle. She turned away her eyes from the white and gold to the dark bundle, and as her hands touched the serge, her tears began to be checked. That coarse roughness recalled her fully to the present, from which love and delight were gone. She unfastened the thick white cord and spread the bundle out on the table. It was the grey serge dress of a sister belonging to the third order of St. Francis, living in the world but specially devoted to deeds of piety—a personage whom the Florentines were accustomed to call a Pinzochera. Romola was going to put on this dress as a disguise, and she determined to put it on at once, so that, if she needed sleep before the morning, she might wake up in perfect readiness to be gone. She put off her black garment, and as she thrust her soft white arms into the harsh sleeves of the serge mantle and felt the hard girdle of rope hurt her fingers as she tied it, she courted those rude sensations: they were in keeping with her new scorn of that thing called pleasure which made men base—that dexterous contrivance for selfish ease, that shrinking from endurance and strain, when others were bowing beneath burdens too heavy for them, which now made one image with her husband.

Then she gathered her long hair together, drew it away tight from her face, bound it in a great hard knot at the back of her head, and taking a square piece of black silk, tied it in the fashion of a kerchief close across her head and under her chin; and over that she drew the cowl. She lifted the candle to the mirror. Surely her disguise would be complete to any one who had not lived very near to her. To herself she looked strangely like her brother Dino: the full oval of the cheek had only to be wasted; the eyes, already sad, had only to become a little sunken. Was she getting more like him in anything else? Only in this, that she understood now how men could be prompted to rush away for ever from earthly delights, how they could be prompted to dwell on images of sorrow rather than of beauty and joy.

But she did not linger at the mirror: she set about collecting and packing all the relics of her father and mother that were too large to be carried in her small travelling wallet. They were all to be put in the chest along with her wedding-clothes, and the chest was to be committed to her godfather when she was safely gone. First she laid in the portraits; then one by one every little thing that had a sacred memory clinging to it was put into her wallet or into the chest.

She paused. There was still something else to be stript away from her belonging to that past on which

she was going to turn her back for ever. She put her thumb and her forefinger to her betrothal ring; but they rested there, without drawing it off. Romola's mind had been rushing with an impetuous current towards this act for which she was preparing: the act of quitting a husband who had disappointed all her trust, the act of breaking an outward tie that no longer represented the inward bond of love. But that force of outward symbols by which our active life is knit together so as to make an inexorable external identity for us, not to be shaken by our wavering consciousness, gave a strange effect to this simple movement towards taking off her ring—a movement which was but a small sequence of her energetic resolution. It brought a vague but arresting sense that she was somehow violently rending her life in two: a presentiment that the strong impulse which had seemed to exclude doubt and make her path clear might after all be blindness, and that there was something in human bonds which must prevent them from being broken with the breaking of illusions.

If that beloved Tito who had placed the betrothal ring on her finger was not in any valid sense the same Tito whom she had ceased to love, why should she return to him the sign of their union, and not rather retain it as a memorial? And this act, which came as a palpable demonstration of her own and his identity, had a power, unexplained to herself, of

shaking Romola. It is the way with half the truth amidst which we live, that it only haunts us and makes dull pulsations that are never born into sound. But there was a passionate voice speaking within her that presently nullified all such muffled murmurs.

“It cannot be! I cannot be subject to him. He is false. I shrink from him. I despise him!”

She snatched the ring from her finger and laid it on the table against the pen with which she meant to write. Again she felt that there could be no law for her but the law of her affections. That tenderness and keen fellow-feeling for the near and the loved which are the main outgrowth of the affections, had made the religion of her life: they had made her patient in spite of natural impetuosity; they would have sufficed to make her heroic. But now all that strength was gone, or, rather, it was converted into the strength of repulsion. She had recoiled from Tito in proportion to the energy of that young belief and love which he had disappointed, of that life-long devotion to her father against which he had committed an irredeemable offence. And it seemed as if all motive had slipped away from her, except the indignation and scorn that made her tear herself asunder from him.

She was not acting after any precedent, or obeying any adopted maxims. The grand severity of the stoical philosophy in which her father had taken care to instruct her, was familiar enough to her ears and

lips, and its lofty spirit had raised certain echoes within her; but she had never used it, never needed it as a rule of life. She had endured and forborne because she loved: maxims which told her to feel less, and not to cling close lest the onward course of great Nature should jar her, had been as powerless on her tenderness as they had been on her father's yearning for just fame. She had appropriated no theories: she had simply felt strong in the strength of affection, and life without that energy came to her as an entirely new problem.

She was going to solve the problem in a way that seemed to her very simple. Her mind had never yet bowed to any obligation apart from personal love and reverence; she had no keen sense of any other human relations, and all she had to obey now was the instinct to sever herself from the man she loved no longer.

Yet the unswerving resolution was accompanied with continually varying phases of anguish. And now that the active preparation for her departure was almost finished, she lingered: she deferred writing the irrevocable words of parting from all her little world. The emotions of the past weeks seemed to rush in again with cruel hurry, and take possession even of her limbs. She was going to write, and her hand fell. Bitter tears came now at the delusion which had blighted her young years: tears very different from the sob of remembered happiness with

which she had looked at the circlet of pearls and the pink hailstone. And now she felt a tingling shame at the words of ignominy she had cast at Tito—"Have you robbed some one else who is *not* dead?" To have had such words wrung from her—to have uttered them to her husband seemed a degradation of her whole life. Hard speech between those who have loved is hideous in the memory, like the sight of greatness and beauty sunk into vice and rags.

That heart-cutting comparison of the present with the past urged itself upon Romola till it even transformed itself into wretched sensations: she seemed benumbed to everything but inward throbbings, and began to feel the need of some hard contact. She drew her hands tight along the harsh knotted cord that hung from her waist. She started to her feet and seized the rough lid of the chest: there was nothing else to go in? No. She closed the lid, pressing her hand upon the rough carving, and locked it.

Then she remembered that she had still to complete her equipment as a Pinzochera. The large leather purse or scarsella, with small coin in it, had to be hung on the cord at her waist (her florins and small jewels, presents from her godfather and cousin Brigida, were safely fastened within her serge mantle)—and on the other side must hang the rosary.

It did not occur to Romola as she hung that rosary by her side that something else besides the

mere garb would perhaps be necessary to enable her to pass as a Pinzochera, and that her whole air and expression were as little as possible like those of a sister whose eyelids were used to be bent and whose lips were used to move in silent iteration. Her inexperience prevented her from picturing distant details, and it helped her proud courage in shutting out any foreboding of danger and insult. She did not know that any Florentine woman had ever done exactly what she was going to do: unhappy wives often took refuge with their friends, or in the cloister, she knew, but both those courses were impossible to her; she had invented a lot for herself—to go to the most learned woman in the world, Cassandra Fedele, at Venice, and ask her how an instructed woman could support herself in a lonely life there.

She was not daunted by the practical difficulties in the way or the dark uncertainty at the end. Her life could never be happy any more, but it must not, could not be ignoble. And by a pathetic mixture of childish romance with her woman's trials, the philosophy which had nothing to do with this great decisive deed of hers had its place in her imagination of the future: so far as she conceived her solitary loveless life at all, she saw it animated by a proud stoical heroism, and by an indistinct but strong purpose of labour, that she might be wise enough to write something which would rescue her father's name from oblivion. After all, she was only a young girl



—this poor Romola, who had found herself at the end of her joys.

There were other things yet to be done. There was a small key in a casket on the table—but now Romola perceived that her taper was dying out, and she had forgotten to provide herself with any other light. In a few moments the room was in total darkness. Feeling her way to the nearest chair, she sat down to wait for the morning.

Her purpose in seeking the key had called up certain memories which had come back upon her during the past week with the new vividness that remembered words always have for us when we have learned to give them a new meaning. Since the shock of the revelation which had seemed to divide her for ever from Tito, that last interview with Dino had never been for many hours together out of her mind. And it solicited her all the more, because while its remembered images pressed upon her almost with the imperious force of sensations, they raised struggling thoughts which resisted their influence. She could not prevent herself from hearing inwardly the dying prophetic voice saying again and again,—“The man whose face was a blank loosed thy hand and departed; and as he went, I could see his face, and it was the face of the Great Tempter . . . . And thou, Romola, didst wring thy hands and seek for water, and there was none . . . . and the plain was bare and stony again, and thou wast alone in the midst of

it. And then it seemed that the night fell, and I saw no more." She could not prevent herself from dwelling with a sort of agonized fascination on the wasted face; on the straining gaze at the crucifix; on the awe which had compelled her to kneel; on the last broken words and then the unbroken silence—on all the details of the death-scene, which had seemed like a sudden opening into a world apart from that of her life-long knowledge.

But her mind was roused to resistance of impressions that, from being obvious phantoms, seemed to be getting solid in the daylight. As a strong body struggles against fumes with the more violence when they begin to be stifling, a strong soul struggles against phantasies with all the more alarmed energy when they threaten to govern in the place of thought.

What had the words of that vision to do with her real sorrows? That fitting of certain words was a mere chance; the rest was all vague—nay, those words themselves were vague; they were determined by nothing but her brother's memories and beliefs. He believed there was something fatal in pagan learning; he believed that celibacy was more holy than marriage; he remembered their home, and all the objects in the library; and of these threads the vision was woven. What reasonable warrant could she have had for believing in such a vision and acting on it? None. True as the voice of foreboding had proved, Romola saw with unshaken conviction that to have

renounced Tito in obedience to a warning like that, would have been meagre-hearted folly. Her trust had been delusive, but she would have chosen over again to have acted on it rather than be a creature led by phantoms and disjointed whispers in a world where there was the large music of reasonable speech, and the warm grasp of living hands.

But the persistent presence of these memories, linking themselves in her imagination with her actual lot, gave her a glimpse of understanding into the lives which had before lain utterly aloof from her sympathy—the lives of the men and women who were led by such inward images and voices.

“If they were only a little stronger in me,” she said to herself, “I should lose the sense of what that vision really was, and take it for a prophetic light. I might in time get to be a seer of visions myself, like the Suora Maddalena, and Camilla Rucellai, and the rest.”

Romola shuddered at the possibility. All the instruction, all the main influences of her life had gone to fortify her scorn of that sickly superstition which led men and women, with eyes too weak for the daylight, to sit in dark swamps and try to read human destiny by the chance flame of wandering vapours.

And yet she was conscious of something deeper than that coincidence of words which made the parting contact with her dying brother live anew in

her mind, and gave a new sisterhood to the wasted face. If there were much more of such experience as his in the world, she would like to understand it—would even like to learn the thoughts of men who sank in ecstasy before the pictured agonies of martyrdom. There seemed to be something more than madness in that supreme fellowship with suffering. The springs were all dried up around her; she wondered what other waters there were at which men drank and found strength in the desert. And those moments in the Duomo when she had sobbed with a mysterious mingling of rapture and pain, while Fra Girolamo offered himself a willing sacrifice for the people, came back to her as if they had been a transient taste of some such far-off fountain. But again she shrank from impressions that were alluring her within the sphere of visions and narrow fears which compelled men to outrage natural affections as Dino had done.

This was the tangled web that Romola had in her mind as she sat weary in the darkness. No radiant angel came across the gloom with a clear message for her. In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision—men who believed falsities as well as truths, and did the wrong as well as the right. The helping

hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life, or else to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path, but the arrest of inaction and death.

And so Romola, seeing no ray across the darkness, and heavy with conflict that changed nothing, sank at last to sleep.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE TABERNACLE UNLOCKED.

ROMOLA was waked by a tap at the door. The cold light of early morning was in the room, and Maso was come for the travelling wallet. The old man could not help starting when she opened the door, and showed him, instead of the graceful outline he had been used to, crowned with the brightness of her hair, the thick folds of the grey mantle and the pale face shadowed by the dark cowl.

“It is well, Maso,” said Romola, trying to speak in the calmest voice, and make the old man easy. “Here is the wallet quite ready. You will go on quietly, and I shall not be far behind you. When you get out of the gates, you may go more slowly, for I shall perhaps join you before you get to Trespiano.”

She closed the door behind him, and then put her hand on the key which she had taken from the casket the last thing in the night. It was the original key of the little painted tabernacle: Tito had forgotten to drown it in the Arno, and it had lodged, as such small things will, in the corner of the embroidered

scarsella which he wore with the purple tunic. One day, long after their marriage, Romola had found it there, and had put it by, without using it, but with a sense of satisfaction that the key was within reach. The cabinet on which the tabernacle stood had been moved to the side of the room, close to one of the windows, where the pale morning light fell upon it so as to make the painted forms discernible enough to Romola, who knew them well,—the triumphant Bacchus, with his clusters and his vine-clad spear, clasping the crowned Ariadne; the Loves showering roses, the wreathed vessels, the cunning-eyed dolphins, and the rippled sea; all encircled by a flowery border, like a bower of paradise. Romola looked at the familiar images with new bitterness and repulsion: they seemed a more pitiable mockery than ever on this chill morning, when she had waked up to wander in loneliness. They had been no tomb of sorrow, but a lying screen. Foolish Ariadne! with her gaze of love, as if that bright face, with its hyacinthine curls like tendrils among the vines, held the deep secret of her life!

“Ariadne is wonderfully transformed,” thought Romola. “She would look strange among the vines and the roses now.”

She took up the mirror, and looked at herself once more. But the sight was so startling in this morning light that she laid it down again, with a sense of

shrinking almost as strong as that with which she had turned from the joyous Ariadne. The recognition of her own face, with the cowl about it, brought back the dread lest she should be drawn at last into fellowship with some wretched superstition—into the company of the howling fanatics and weeping nuns who had been her contempt from childhood till now. She thrust the key into the tabernacle hurriedly: hurriedly she opened it, and took out the crucifix, without looking at it; then, with trembling fingers, she passed a cord through the little ring, hung the crucifix round her neck, and hid it in the bosom of her mantle. "For Dino's sake," she said to herself.

Still there were the letters to be written which Maso was to carry back from Bologna. They were very brief. The first said,

"Tito, my love for you is dead; and therefore, so far as I was yours, I too am dead. Do not try to put in force any laws for the sake of fetching me back: that would bring you no happiness. The Romola you married can never return. I need explain nothing to you after the words I uttered to you the last time we spoke long together. If you supposed them to be words of transient anger, you will know now that they were the sign of an irreversible change.

"I think you will fulfil my wish that my bridal chest should be sent to my godfather, who gave it



me. It contains my wedding clothes and the portraits and other relics of my father and mother."

She folded the ring inside this letter, and wrote Tito's name outside. The next letter was to Bernardo del Nero:—

"DEAREST GODFATHER,

"IF I could have been any good to your life by staying, I would not have gone away to a distance. But now I am gone. Do not ask the reason; and if you loved my father, try to prevent any one from seeking me. I could not bear my life at Florence. I cannot bear to tell any one why. Help to cover my lot in silence. I have asked that my bridal chest should be sent to you: when you open it, you will know the reason. Please to give all the things that were my mother's to my cousin Brigida, and ask her to forgive me for not saying any words of parting to her.

"Farewell, my second father. The best thing I have in life is still to remember your goodness and be grateful to you.

"ROMOLA."

Romola put the letters, along with the crucifix, within the bosom of her mantle, and then felt that everything was done. She was ready now to depart.

No one was stirring in the house, and she went almost as quietly as a grey phantom down the stairs and into the silent street. Her heart was palpitating violently, yet she enjoyed the sense of her firm tread

on the broad flags—of the swift movement, which was like a chained-up resolution set free at last. The anxiety to carry out her act, and the dread of any obstacle, averted sorrow; and as she reached the Ponte Rubaconte, she felt less that Santa Croce was in her sight than that the yellow streak of morning which parted the grey was getting broader and broader, and that, unless she hastened her steps, she should have to encounter faces.

Her simplest road was to go right on to the Borgo Pinti, and then along by the walls to the Porta San Gallo, from which she must leave the city, and this road carried her by the Piazza di Santa Croce. But she walked as steadily and rapidly as ever through the piazza, not trusting herself to look towards the church. The thought that any eyes might be turned on her with a look of curiosity and recognition, and that indifferent minds might be set speculating on her private sorrows, made Romola shrink physically as from the imagination of torture. She felt degraded even by that act of her husband from which she was helplessly suffering. But there was no sign that any eyes looked forth from windows to notice this tall grey sister, with the firm step, and proud attitude of the cowled head. Her road lay aloof from the stir of early traffic, and when she reached the Porta San Gallo, it was easy to pass while a dispute was going forward about the toll for panniers of eggs and market produce which were just entering.

Out! Once past the houses of the Borgo, she would be beyond the last fringe of Florence, the sky would be broad above her, and she would have entered on her new life—a life of loneliness and endurance, but of freedom. She had been strong enough to snap asunder the bonds she had accepted in blind faith: whatever befel her, she would no more feel the breath of soft hated lips warm upon her cheek, no longer feel the breath of an odious mind stifling her own. The bare wintry morning, the chill air, were welcome in their severity: the leafless trees, the sombre hills, were not haunted by the gods of beauty and joy, whose worship she had forsaken for ever.

But presently the light burst forth with sudden strength, and shadows were thrown across the road. It seemed that the sun was going to chase away the greyness. The light is perhaps never felt more strongly as a divine presence stirring all those inarticulate sensibilities which are our deepest life, than in these moments when it instantaneously awakens the shadows. A certain awe which inevitably accompanied this most momentous act of her life became a more conscious element in Romola's feeling as she found herself in the sudden presence of the impalpable golden glory and the long shadow of herself that was not to be escaped. Hitherto she had met no one but an occasional contadino with mules, and the many turnings of the road on the level prevented her from seeing that Maso was not very far ahead of her.

But when she had passed Pietra and was on rising ground, she lifted up the hanging roof of her cowl and looked eagerly before her.

The cowl was dropped again immediately. She had seen, not Maso, but—two monks, who were approaching within a few yards of her. The edge of her cowl making a pent-house on her brow had shut out the objects above the level of her eyes, and for the last few moments she had been looking at nothing but the brightness on the path and at her own shadow, tall and shrouded like a dread spectre.

She wished now that she had not looked up. Her disguise made her especially dislike to encounter monks: they might expect some pious passwords of which she knew nothing, and she walked along with a careful appearance of unconsciousness till she had seen the skirts of the black mantles pass by her. The encounter had made her heart beat disagreeably, for Romola had an uneasiness in her religious disguise, a shame at this studied concealment, which was made more distinct by a special effort to appear unconscious under actual glances.

But the black skirts would be gone the faster because they were going down hill; and seeing a great flat stone against a cypress that rose from a projecting green bank, she yielded to the desire which the slight shock had given her, to sit down and rest.

She turned her back on Florence, not meaning to look at it till the monks were quite out of sight; and

raising the edge of her cowl again when she had seated herself, she discerned Maso and the mules at a distance where it was not hopeless for her to overtake them, as the old man would probably linger in expectation of her.

Meanwhile she might pause a little. She was free and alone.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE BLACK MARKS BECOME MAGICAL.

THAT journey of Tito's to Rome, which had removed many difficulties from Romola's departure, had been resolved on quite suddenly, at a supper, only the evening before.

Tito had set out towards that supper with agreeable expectations. The meats were likely to be delicate, the wines choice, the company distinguished; for the place of entertainment was the Selva or Orto de' Rucellai, or, as we should say, the Rucellai Gardens; and the host, Bernardo Rucellai, was quite a typical Florentine grandee. Even his family name has a significance which is prettily symbolic: properly understood, it may bring before us a little lichen, popularly named *orcella* or *roccella*, which grows on the rocks of Greek isles and in the Canaries; and having drunk a great deal of light into its little stems and button-heads, will, under certain circumstances, give it out again as a reddish purple dye, very grateful to the eyes of men. By bringing the excellent secret of this dye, called *oricello*, from the

Levant to Florence, a certain merchant, who lived nearly a hundred years before our Bernardo's time, won for himself and his descendants much wealth, and the pleasantly-suggestive surname of Oricellari, or Roccellari, which on Tuscan tongues speedily became Rucellai.

And our Bernardo, who stands out more prominently than the rest on this purple background, had added all sorts of distinction to the family name: he had married the sister of Lorenzo de' Medici, and had had the most splendid wedding in the memory of Florentine upholstery; and for these and other virtues he had been sent on embassies to France and Venice, and had been chosen Gonfaloniere; he had not only built himself a fine palace, but had finished putting the black and white marble façade to the church of Santa Maria Novella; he had planted a garden with rare trees, and had made it classic ground by receiving within it the meetings of the Platonic Academy, orphaned by the death of Lorenzo; he had written an excellent, learned book, of a new topographical sort, about ancient Rome; he had collected antiquities; he had a pure Latinity. The simplest account of him, one sees, reads like a laudatory epitaph, at the end of which the Greek and Ausonian Muses might be confidently requested to tear their hair, and Nature to desist from any second attempt to combine so many virtues with one set of viscera.

His invitation had been conveyed to Tito through Lorenzo Tornabuoni, with an emphasis which would have suggested that the object of the gathering was political, even if the public questions of the time had been less absorbing. As it was, Tito felt sure that some party purposes were to be furthered by the excellent flavours of stewed fish and old Greek wine; for Bernardo Rucellai was not simply an influential personage, he was one of the elect Twenty who for three weeks had held the reins of Florence. This assurance put Tito in the best spirits as he made his way to the Via della Scala, where the classic garden was to be found: without it, he might have had some uneasy speculation as to whether the high company he would have the honour of meeting was likely to be dull as well as distinguished; for he had had experience of various dull suppers even in the Rucellai gardens, and especially of the dull philosophic sort, wherein he had not only been called upon to accept an entire scheme of the universe (which would have been easy to him), but to listen to an exposition of the same, from the origin of things to their complete ripeness in the tractate of the philosopher then speaking.

It was a dark evening, and it was only when Tito crossed the occasional light of a lamp suspended before an image of the Virgin, that the outline of his figure was discernible enough for recognition. At such moments any one caring to watch his



passage from one of these lights to another might have observed that the tall and graceful personage with the mantle folded round him was followed constantly by a very different form, thick-set and elderly, in a serge tunic and felt hat. The conjunction might have been taken for mere chance, since there were many passengers along the streets at this hour. But when Tito stopped at the gate of the Rucellai gardens, the figure behind stopped too. The *sportello*, or smaller door of the gate, was already being held open by the servant, who, in the distraction of attending to some question, had not yet closed it since the last arrival, and Tito turned in rapidly, giving his name to the servant, and passing on between the evergreen bushes that shone like metal in the torchlight. The follower turned in too.

“Your name?” said the servant.

“Baldassarre Calvo,” was the immediate answer.

“You are not a guest; the guests have all passed.”

“I belong to Tito Melema, who has just gone in. I am to wait in the gardens.”

The servant hesitated. “I had orders to admit only guests. Are you a servant of Messer Tito?”

“No, friend, I am not a servant; I am a scholar.”

There are men to whom you need only say, “I am a buffalo,” in a certain tone of quiet confidence, and they will let you pass. The porter gave way at once, Baldassarre entered, and heard the door closed

and chained behind him, as he too disappeared among the shining bushes.

Those ready and firm answers argued a great change in Baldassarre since the last meeting face to face with Tito, when the dagger broke in two. The change had declared itself in a startling way.

At the moment when the shadow of Tito passed in front of the hovel as he departed homeward, Baldassarre was sitting in that state of after-tremor known to every one who is liable to great outbursts of passion: a state in which physical powerlessness is sometimes accompanied by an exceptional lucidity of thought, as if that disengagement of excited passion had carried away a fire-mist and left clearness behind it. He felt unable to rise and walk away just yet; his limbs seemed benumbed; he was cold, and his hands shook. But in that bodily helplessness he sat surrounded, not by the habitual dimness and vanishing shadows, but by the clear images of the past: he was living again in an unbroken course through that life which seemed a long preparation for the taste of bitterness.

For some minutes he was too thoroughly absorbed by the images to reflect on the fact that he saw them, and note the fact as a change. But when that sudden clearness had travelled through the distance, and came at last to rest on the scene just gone by, he felt fully where he was: he remembered *Monna Lisa* and *Tessa*. Ah! *he* then was the mysterious

husband; he who had another wife in the Via de' Bardi. It was time to pick up the broken dagger and go—go and leave no trace of himself; for to hide his feebleness seemed the thing most like power that was left to him. He leaned to take up the fragments of the dagger; then he turned towards the book which lay open at his side. It was a fine large manuscript, an odd volume of Pausanias. The moonlight was upon it, and he could see the large letters at the head of the page:

ΜΕΣΣΗΝΙΚΑ. ΚΒ'.

In old days he had known Pausanias familiarly; yet an hour or two ago he had been looking hopelessly at that page, and it had suggested no more meaning to him than if the letters had been black weather-marks on a wall; but at this moment they were once more the magic signs that conjure up a world. That moonbeam falling on the letters had raised Messenia before him, and its struggle against the Spartan oppression.

He snatched up the book, but the light was too pale for him to read further by. No matter: he knew that chapter; he read inwardly. He saw the stoning of the traitor Aristocrates—stoned by a whole people, who cast him out from their borders to lie unburied, and set up a pillar with verses upon it, telling how Time had brought home justice to the unjust. The words arose within him, and stirred

innumerable vibrations of memory. He forgot that he was old: he could almost have shouted. The light was come again, mother of knowledge and joy! In that exultation his limbs recovered their strength: he started up with his broken dagger and book, and went out under the broad moonlight.

It was a nipping frosty air, but Baldassarre could feel no chill—he only felt the glow of conscious power. He walked about and paused on all the open spots of that high ground, and looked down on the domed and towered city, sleeping darkly under its sleeping guardians, the mountains; on the pale gleam of the river; on the valley vanishing towards the peaks of snow; and felt himself master of them all.

That sense of mental empire which belongs to us all in moments of exceptional clearness was intensified for him by the long days and nights in which memory had been little more than the consciousness of something gone. That city, which had been a weary labyrinth, was material that he could subdue to his purposes now: his mind glanced through its affairs with flashing conjecture; he was once more a man who knew cities, whose sense of vision was instructed with large experience, and who felt the keen delight of holding all things in the grasp of language. Names! Images!—his mind rushed through its wealth without pausing, like one who enters on a great inheritance.

But amidst all that rushing eagerness there was one end presiding in Baldassarre's consciousness,—a dark deity in the inmost cell, who only seemed forgotten while his hecatomb was being prepared. And when the first triumph in the certainty of recovered power had had its way, his thoughts centred themselves on Tito. That fair slippery viper could not escape him now; thanks to struggling justice, the heart that never quivered with tenderness for another had its sensitive selfish fibres that could be reached by the sharp point of anguish. The soul that bowed to no right, bowed to the great lord of mortals, Pain.

He could search into every secret of Tito's life now: he knew some of the secrets already, and the failure of the broken dagger, which seemed like frustration, had been the beginning of achievement. Doubtless that sudden rage had shaken away the obstruction which stifled his soul. Twice before, when his memory had partially returned, it had been in consequence of sudden excitation: once when he had had to defend himself from an enraged dog; once when he had been overtaken by the waves, and had had to scramble up a rock to save himself.

Yes, but if this time, as then, the light were to die out, and the dreary conscious blank come back again! This time the light was stronger and steadier; but what security was there that before the morrow the dark fog would not be round him again? Even the fear seemed like the beginning of feebleness: he

thought with alarm that he might sink the faster for this excited vigil of his on the hill, which was expending his force; and after seeking anxiously for a sheltered corner where he might lie down, he nestled at last against a heap of warm garden straw, and so fell asleep.

When he opened his eyes again it was daylight. The first moments were filled with strange bewilderment: he was a man with a double identity; to which had he awaked?—to the life of dim-sighted sensibilities like the sad heirship of some fallen greatness, or to the life of recovered power? Surely the last, for the events of the night all came back to him: the recognition of the page in Pausanias, the crowding resurgence of facts and names, the sudden wide prospect which had given him such a moment as that of the Mænad in the glorious amaze of her morning waking on the mountain top.

He took up the book again, he read, he remembered without reading. He saw a name, and the images of deeds rose with it; he saw the mention of a deed, and he linked it with a name. There were stories of inexpressible crimes, but stories also of guilt that seemed successful. There were sanctuaries for swift-footed miscreants; baseness had its armour, and the weapons of justice sometimes broke against it. What then? If baseness triumphed everywhere else, if it could heap to itself all the goods of the world and even hold the keys of hell, it would

never triumph over the hatred itself awaked. It could devise no torture that would seem greater than the torture of submitting to its smile. Baldassarre felt the indestructible independent force of a supreme emotion, which knows no terror, and asks for no motive, which is itself an ever-burning motive, consuming all other desire. And now, in this morning light, when the assurance came again that the fine fibres of association were active still, and that his recovered self had not departed, all his gladness was but the hope of vengeance.

From that time till the evening on which we have seen him enter the Rucellai gardens, he had been incessantly, but cautiously, inquiring into Tito's position and all his circumstances, and there was hardly a day on which he did not contrive to follow his movements. But he wished not to arouse any alarm in Tito: he wished to secure a moment when the hated favourite of blind fortune was at the summit of confident ease, surrounded by chief men on whose favour he depended. It was not any retributive payment or recognition of himself for his own behoof, on which Baldassarre's whole soul was bent: it was to find the sharpest edge of disgrace and shame by which a selfish smiler could be pierced; it was to send through his marrow the most sudden shock of dread. He was content to lie hard, and live stintedly—he had spent the greater part of his remaining money in buying another poniard: his

hunger and his thirst were after nothing exquisite but an exquisite vengeance. He had avoided addressing himself to any one whom he suspected of intimacy with Tito, lest an alarm raised in Tito's mind should urge him either to flight or to some other counteracting measure which hard-pressed ingenuity might devise. For this reason he had never entered Nello's shop, which he observed that Tito frequented, and he had turned aside to avoid meeting Piero di Cosimo.

The possibility of frustration gave added eagerness to his desire that the great opportunity he sought should not be deferred. The desire was eager in him on another ground; he trembled lest his memory should go again. Whether from the agitating presence of that fear, or from some other causes, he had twice felt a sort of mental dizziness, in which the inward sense or imagination seemed to be losing the distinct forms of things. Once he had attempted to enter the Palazzo Vecchio and make his way into a council-chamber where Tito was, and had failed. But now, on this evening, he felt that his occasion was come.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## A SUPPER IN THE RUCELLAI GARDENS.

ON entering the handsome pavilion, Tito's quick glance soon discerned in the selection of the guests the confirmation of his conjecture that the object of the gathering was political, though, perhaps, nothing more distinct than that strengthening of party which comes from good-fellowship. Good dishes and good wine were at that time believed to heighten the consciousness of political preferences, and in the inspired ease of after-supper talk it was supposed that people ascertained their own opinions with a clearness quite inaccessible to uninvited stomachs. The Florentines were a sober and frugal people; but wherever men have gathered wealth, Madonna della Gozzoviglia and San Buonvino have had their worshippers; and the Rucellai were among the few Florentine families who kept a great table and lived splendidly. It was not probable that on this evening there would be any attempt to apply high philosophic theories; and there could be no objection to the bust of Plato

looking on, or even to the modest presence of the cardinal virtues in fresco on the walls.

That bust of Plato had been long used to look down on conviviality of a more transcendental sort, for it had been brought from Lorenzo's villa after his death, when the meetings of the Platonic Academy had been transferred to these gardens. Especially on every thirteenth of November, reputed anniversary of Plato's death, it had looked down from under laurel leaves on a picked company of scholars and philosophers, who met to eat and drink with moderation, and to discuss and admire, perhaps with less moderation, the doctrines of the great master:—on Pico della Mirandola, once a Quixotic young genius with long curls, astonished at his own powers and astonishing Rome with heterodox theses; afterwards a more humble student with a consuming passion for inward perfection, having come to find the universe more astonishing than his own cleverness:—on innocent, laborious Marsilio Ficino, picked out young to be reared as a Platonic philosopher, and fed on Platonism in all its stages till his mind was perhaps a little pulpy from that too exclusive diet:—on Angelo Poliziano, chief literary genius of that age, a born poet, and a scholar without dulness, whose phrases had blood in them and are alive still:—or, farther back, on Leon Battista Alberti, a reverend senior when those three were young, and of a much grander type than they, a robust, universal mind, at

once practical and theoretic, artist, man of science, inventor, poet:—and on many more valiant workers whose names are not registered where every day we turn the leaf to read them, but whose labours make a part, though an unrecognized part, of our inheritance, like the ploughing and sowing of past generations.

Bernardo Rucellai was a man to hold a distinguished place in that Academy even before he became its host and patron. He was still in the prime of life, not more than four and forty, with a somewhat haughty, cautiously dignified presence; conscious of an amazingly pure Latinity, but, says Erasmus, not to be caught speaking Latin—no word of Latin to be sheared off him by the sharpest of Teutons. He welcomed Tito with more marked favour than usual, and gave him a place between Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giannozzo Pucci, both of them accomplished young members of the Medicean party.

Of course the talk was the lightest in the world while the brass bowl filled with scented water was passing round, that the company might wash their hands, and rings flashed on white fingers under the wax-lights, and there was the pleasant fragrance of fresh white damask newly come from France. The tone of remark was a very common one in those times. Some one asked what Dante's pattern old Florentine would think if the life could come into him again under his leathern belt and bone clasp,

and he could see silver forks on the table? And it was agreed on all hands that the habits of posterity would be very surprising to ancestors, if ancestors could only know them.

And while the silver forks were just dallying with the appetizing delicacies that introduced the more serious business of the supper—such as morsels of liver, cooked to that exquisite point that they would melt in the mouth—there was time to admire the designs on the enamelled silver centres of the brass service, and to say something, as usual, about the silver dish for confetti, a masterpiece of Antonio Pollajuolo, whom patronizing Popes had seduced from his native Florence to more gorgeous Rome.

“Ah, I remember,” said Niccolò Ridolfi, a middle-aged man, with that negligent ease of manner which, seeming to claim nothing, is really based on the life-long consciousness of commanding rank—“I remember our Antonio getting bitter about his chiselling and enamelling of these metal things, and taking in a fury to painting, because, said he, ‘the artist who puts his work into gold and silver, puts his brains into the melting-pot.’”

“And that is not unlikely to be a true foreboding of Antonio’s,” said Giannozzo Pucci. “If this pretty war with Pisa goes on, and the revolt only spreads a little to our other towns, it is not only our silver dishes that are likely to go; I doubt whether Antonio’s silver saints round the altar of San Giovanni

will not some day vanish from the eyes of the faithful to be worshipped more devoutly in the form of coin."

"The Frate is preparing us for that already," said Tornabuoni. "He is telling the people that God will not have silver crucifixes and starving stomachs; and that the church is best adorned with the gems of holiness and the fine gold of brotherly love."

"A very useful doctrine of war-finance, as many a Condottiere has found," said Bernardo Rucellai, drily. "But politics come on after the confetti, Lorenzo, when we can drink wine enough to wash them down; they are too solid to be taken with roast and boiled."

"Yes, indeed," said Niccolò Ridolfi. "Our Luigi Pulci would have said this delicate boiled kid must be eaten with an impartial mind. I remember one day at Careggi, when Luigi was in his rattling vein, he was maintaining that nothing perverted the palate like opinion. 'Opinion,' said he, 'corrupts the saliva—that's why men took to pepper. Scepticism is the only philosophy that doesn't bring a taste in the mouth.' 'Nay,' says poor Lorenzo de' Medici, 'you must be out there, Luigi. Here is this untainted sceptic, Matteo Franco, who wants hotter sauce than any of us.' 'Because he has a strong opinion of *himself*,' flashes out Luigi, 'which is the original egg of all other opinion. *He* a sceptic? He believes in the immortality of his own verses. He is such a

logician as that preaching friar who described the pavement of the bottomless pit.' Poor Luigi! his mind was like sharpest steel that can touch nothing without cutting."

"And yet a very gentle-hearted creature," said Giannozzo Pucci. "It seemed to me his talk was a mere blowing of soap-bubbles. What dithyrambs he went into about eating and drinking! and yet he was as temperate as a butterfly."

The light talk and the solid eatables were not soon at an end, for after the roast and boiled meats came the indispensable capon and game, and, crowning glory of a well-spread table, a peacock cooked according to the receipt of Apicius for cooking partridges, namely, with the feathers on, but not plucked afterwards, as that great authority ordered concerning his partridges; on the contrary, so disposed on the dish that it might look as much as possible like a live peacock taking its unboiled repose. Great was the skill required in that confidential servant who was the official carver, respectfully to turn the classical though insipid bird on its back, and expose the plucked breast from which he was to dispense a delicate slice to each of the honourable company, unless any one should be of so independent a mind as to decline that expensive toughness and prefer the vulgar digestibility of capon.

Hardly any one was so bold. Tito quoted Horace, and dispersed his slice in small particles over his

plate; Bernardo Rucellai made a learned observation about the ancient price of peacocks' eggs, but did not pretend to eat his slice; and Niccolò Ridolfi held a mouthful on his fork while he told a favourite story of Luigi Pulci's, about a man of Siena, who, wanting to give a splendid entertainment at moderate expense, bought a wild goose, cut off its beak and webbed feet, and boiled it in its feathers, to pass for a pea-hen.

In fact, very little peacock was eaten; but there was the satisfaction of sitting at a table where peacock was served up in a remarkable manner, and of knowing that such caprices were not within reach of any but those who supped with the very wealthiest men. And it would have been rashness to speak slightly of peacock's flesh, or any other venerable institution, at a time when Fra Girolamo was teaching the disturbing doctrine that it was not the duty of the rich to be luxurious for the sake of the poor.

Meanwhile, in the chill obscurity that surrounded this centre of warmth, and light, and savoury odours, the lonely disowned man was walking in gradually narrowing circuits. He paused among the trees, and looked in at the windows, which made brilliant pictures against the gloom. He could hear the laughter; he could see Tito gesticulating with careless grace, and hear his voice, now alone, now mingling in the merry confusion of interlacing speeches. Baldassarre's mind was highly strung. He was preparing himself for the moment when he could win his entrance into

this brilliant company ; and he had a savage satisfaction in the sight of Tito's easy gaiety, which seemed to be preparing the unconscious victim for more effective torture.

But the men seated among the branching tapers and the flashing cups could know nothing of the pale fierce face that watched them from without. The light can be a curtain as well as the darkness.

And the talk went on with more eagerness as it became less disconnected and trivial. The sense of citizenship was just then strongly forced even on the most indifferent minds. What the over-mastering Fra Girolamo was saying and prompting was really uppermost in the thoughts of every one at table ; and before the stewed fish was removed, and while the favourite sweets were yet to come, his name rose to the surface of the conversation, and, in spite of Rucellai's previous prohibition, the talk again became political. At first, while the servants remained present, it was mere gossip : what had been done in the Palazzo on this first day's voting for the Great Council ; how hot-tempered and domineering Francesco Valori was, as if he were to have everything his own way by right of his austere virtue ; and how it was clear to everybody who heard Soderini's speeches in favour of the Great Council, and also heard the Frate's sermons, that they were both kneaded in the same trough.

“ My opinion is,” said Niccolò Ridolfi, “ that the



Frate has a longer head for public matters than Soderini or any Piagnone among them: you may depend on it that Soderini is his mouth-piece more than he is Soderini's."

"No, Niccolò; there I differ from you," said Bernardo Rucellai: "the Frate has an acute mind, and readily sees what will serve his own ends; but it is not likely that Pagolantonio Soderini, who has had long experience of affairs, and has specially studied the Venetian Council, should be much indebted to a monk for ideas on that subject. No, no: Soderini loads the cannon; though, I grant you, Fra Girolamo brings the powder and lights the match. He is master of the people, and the people are getting master of us. Ecco!"

"Well," said Lorenzo Tornabuoni, presently, when the room was clear of servants, and nothing but wine was passing round, "whether Soderini is indebted or not, *we* are indebted to the Frate for the general amnesty which has gone along with the scheme of the Council. We might have done without the fear of God and the reform of morals being passed by a majority of black beans; but that excellent proposition, that our Medicean heads should be allowed to remain comfortably on our shoulders, and that we should not be obliged to hand over our property in fines, has my warm approval, and it is my belief that nothing but the Frate's predominance could have procured that for us. And you may rely on it that

Fra Girolamo is as firm as a rock on that point of promoting peace. I have had an interview with him."

There was a murmur of surprise and curiosity at the farther end of the table; but Bernardo Rucellai simply nodded, as if he knew what Tornabuoni had to say, and wished him to go on.

"Yes," proceeded Tornabuoni, "I have been favoured with an interview in the Frate's own cell, which, let me tell you, is not a common favour; for I have reason to believe that even Francesco Valori very seldom sees him in private. However, I think he saw me the more willingly because I was not a ready-made follower, but had to be converted. And, for my part, I see clearly enough that the only safe and wise policy for us Mediceans to pursue is to throw our strength into the scale of the Frate's party. We are not strong enough to make head on our own behalf; and if the Frate and the popular party were upset, every one who hears me knows perfectly well what other party would be uppermost just now: Nerli, Alberti, Pazzi, and the rest—*Arrabbiati*, as somebody christened them the other day—who, instead of giving us an amnesty, would be inclined to fly at our throats like mad dogs, and not be satisfied till they had banished half of us."

There were strong interjections of assent to this last sentence of Tornabuoni's, as he paused and looked round a moment.

“A wise dissimulation,” he went on, “is the only course for moderate rational men in times of violent party feeling. I need hardly tell this company what are my real political attachments: I am not the only man here who has strong personal ties to the banished family; but, apart from any such ties, I agree with my more experienced friends, who are allowing me to speak for them in their presence, that the only lasting and peaceful state of things for Florence is the predominance of some single family interest. This theory of the Frate’s, that we are to have a popular government, in which every man is to strive only for the general good, and know no party names, is a theory that may do for some isle of Cristoforo Colombo’s finding, but will never do for our fine old quarrelsome Florence. A change must come before long, and with patience and caution we have every chance of determining the change in our favour. Meanwhile, the best thing we can do will be to keep the Frate’s flag flying, for if any other were to be hoisted just now it would be a black flag for us.”

“It’s true,” said Niccolò Ridolfi, in a curt decisive way. “What you say is true, Lorenzo. For my own part, I am too old for anybody to believe that I’ve changed my feathers. And there are certain of us—our old Bernardo del Nero for one—whom you would never persuade to borrow another man’s shield. But we can lie still, like sleepy old dogs; and it’s clear enough that barking would be of no use just

now. As for this psalm-singing party, who vote for nothing but the glory of God, and want to make believe we can all love each other, and talk as if vice could be swept out with a besom by the Magnificent Eight, their day will not be a long one. After all the talk of scholars, there are but two sorts of government: one where men show their teeth at each other, and one where men show their tongues and lick the feet of the strongest. They'll get their Great Council finally voted to-morrow—that's certain enough—and they'll think they've found out a new plan of government; but as sure as there's a human skin under every lucco in the Council, their new plan will end like every other, in snarling or in licking. That's my view of things as a plain man. Not that I consider it becoming in men of family and following, who have got others depending on their constancy and on their sticking to their colours, to go a-hunting with a fine net to catch reasons in the air, like doctors of law. I say frankly that, as the head of my family, I shall be true to my old alliances; and I have never yet seen any chalk-mark on political reasons to tell me which is true and which is false. My friend Bernardo Rucellai here is a man of reasons, I know, and I've no objection to anybody's finding fine-spun reasons for me, so that they don't interfere with my actions as a man of family who has faith to keep with his connections."

"If that is an appeal to me, Niccolò," said Bernardo

Rucellai, with a formal dignity, in amusing contrast with Ridolfi's curt and pithy ease, "I may take this opportunity of saying, that while my wishes are partly determined by long-standing personal relations, I cannot enter into any positive schemes with persons over whose actions I have no control. I myself might be content with a restoration of the old order of things; but with modifications—with important modifications. And the one point on which I wish to declare my concurrence with Lorenzo Tornabuoni is, that the best policy to be pursued by our friends is, to throw the weight of their interest into the scale of the popular party. For myself, I condescend to no dissimulation; nor do I at present see the party or the scheme that commands my full assent. In all alike there is crudity and confusion of ideas, and of all the twenty men who are my colleagues in the present crisis, there is not one with whom I do not find myself in wide disagreement."

Niccolò Ridolfi shrugged his shoulders, and left it to some one else to take up the ball. As the wine went round the talk became more and more frank and lively, and the desire of several at once to be the chief speaker, as usual caused the company to break up into small knots of two and three.

It was a result which had been foreseen by Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giannozzo Pucci, and they were among the first to turn aside from the high-road of general talk and enter into a special conversation

with Tito, who sat between them; gradually pushing away their seats, and turning their backs on the table and wine.

“In truth, Melema,” Tornabuoni was saying at this stage, laying one hose-clad leg across the knee of the other, and caressing his ankle, “I know of no man in Florence who can serve our party better than you. You see what most of our friends are: men who can no more hide their prejudices than a dog can hide the natural tone of his bark, or else men whose political ties are so notorious, that they must always be objects of suspicion. Giannozzo here, and I, I flatter myself, are able to overcome that suspicion; we have that power of concealment and finesse, without which a rational cultivated man, instead of having any prerogative, is really at a disadvantage compared with a wild bull or a savage. But, except yourself, I know of no one else on whom we could rely for the necessary discretion.”

“Yes,” said Giannozzo Pucci, laying his hand on Tito’s shoulder, “the fact is, Tito mio, you can help us better than if you were Ulysses himself, for I am convinced that Ulysses often made himself disagreeable. To manage men one ought to have a sharp mind in a velvet sheath. And there is not a soul in Florence who could undertake a business like this journey to Rome, for example, with the same safety that you can. There is your scholarship, which may always be a pretext for such journeys; and what is

better, there is your talent, which it would be harder to match than your scholarship. Niccolò Macchiavelli might have done for us if he had been on our side, but hardly so well. He is too much bitten with notions, and has not your power of fascination. All the worse for him. He has lost a great chance in life, and you have got it."

"Yes," said Tornabuoni, lowering his voice in a significant manner, "you have only to play your game well, Melema, and the future belongs to you. For the Medici, you may rely upon it, will keep a foot in Rome as well as in Florence, and the time may not be far off when they will be able to make a finer career for their adherents even than they did in old days. Why shouldn't you take orders some day? There's a cardinal's hat at the end of that road, and you would not be the first Greek who has worn that ornament."

Tito laughed gaily. He was too acute not to measure Tornabuoni's exaggerated flattery, but still the flattery had a pleasant flavour.

"My joints are not so stiff yet," he said, "that I can't be induced to run without such a high prize as that. I think the income of an abbey or two held 'in commendam,' without the trouble of getting my head shaved, would satisfy me at present."

"I was not joking," said Tornabuoni, with grave suavity; "I think a scholar would always be the better off for taking orders. But we'll talk of that

another time. One of the objects to be first borne in mind, is that you should win the confidence of the men who hang about San Marco; that is what Giannozzo and I shall do, but you may carry it farther than we can, because you are less observed. In that way you can get a thorough knowledge of their doings, and you will make a broader screen for your agency on our side. Nothing of course can be done before you start for Rome, because this bit of business between Piero de' Medici and the French nobles must be effected at once. I mean when you come back, of course; I need say no more. I believe you could make yourself the pet votary of San Marco, if you liked; but you are wise enough to know that effective dissimulation is never immoderate."

"If it were not that an adhesion to the popular side is necessary to your safety as an agent of our party, Tito mio," said Giannozzo Pucci, who was more fraternal and less patronizing in his manners than Tornabuoni, "I could have wished your skill to have been employed in another way, for which it is still better fitted. But now we must look out for some other man among us who will manage to get into the confidence of our sworn enemies, the Arrabbiati; we need to know their movements more than those of the Frate's party, who are strong enough to play above board. Still, it would have been a difficult thing for you, from your known relations with the Medici a little while back, and that sort of kin-



ship your wife has with Bernardo del Nero. We must find a man who has no distinguished connections, and who has not yet taken any side."

Tito was pushing his hair back automatically, as his manner was, and looking straight at Pucci with a scarcely perceptible smile on his lip.

"No need to look out for any one else," he said, promptly. "I can manage the whole business with perfect ease. I will engage to make myself the special confidant of that thick-headed Dolfo Spini, and know his projects before he knows them himself."

Tito seldom spoke so confidently of his own powers, but he was in a state of exaltation at the sudden opening of a new path before him, where fortune seemed to have hung higher prizes than any he had thought of hitherto. Hitherto he had seen success only in the form of favour; it now flashed on him in the shape of power—of such power as is possible to talent without traditional ties, and without beliefs. Each party that thought of him as a tool might become dependent on him. His position as an alien, his indifference to the ideas or prejudices of the men amongst whom he moved, were suddenly transformed into advantages; he became newly conscious of his own adroitness in the presence of a game that he was called on to play. And all the motives which might have made Tito shrink from the triple deceit that came before him as a tempting game, had

been slowly strangled in him by the successive falsities of his life.

Our lives make a moral tradition for our individual selves, as the life of mankind at large makes a moral tradition for the race; and to have once acted greatly seems a reason why we should always be noble. But Tito was feeling the effect of an opposite tradition: he had won no memories of self-conquest and perfect faithfulness from which he could have a sense of falling.

The triple colloquy went on with growing spirit till it was interrupted by a call from the table. Probably the movement came from the listeners in the party, who were afraid lest the talkers should tire themselves. At all events it was agreed that there had been enough of gravity, and Rucellai had just ordered new flasks of Montepulciano.

“How many minstrels are there among us?” he said, when there had been a general rallying round the table. “Melema, I think you are the chief: Matteo will give you the lute.”

“Ah, yes!” said Giannozzo Pucci, “lead the last chorus from Poliziano’s *Orfeo*, that you have found such an excellent measure for, and we will all fall in:—

Ciascun segua, o Bacco, te :  
Bacco, Bacco, evoè, evoè !”

The servant put the lute into Tito’s hands, and then said something in an under-tone to his master.

A little subdued questioning and answering went on between them, while Tito touched the lute in a pre-luding way to the strain of the chorus, and there was a confusion of speech and musical humming all round the table. Bernardo Rucellai had said, "Wait a moment, Melema;" but the words had been unheard by Tito, who was leaning towards Pucci, and singing low to him the phrases of the Mænad-chorus. He noticed nothing until the buzz round the table suddenly ceased, and the notes of his own voice, with its soft low-toned triumph, "Evoè, evoè!" fell in startling isolation.

It was a strange moment. Baldassarre had moved round the table till he was opposite Tito, and as the hum ceased there might be seen for an instant Baldassarre's fierce dark eyes bent on Tito's bright smiling unconsciousness, while the low notes of triumph dropped from his lips into the silence.

Tito looked up with a slight start, and his lips turned pale, but he seemed hardly more moved than Giannozzo Pucci, who had looked up at the same moment—or even than several others round the table; for that sallow deep-lined face with the hatred in its eyes seemed a terrible apparition across the wax-lit ease and gaiety. And Tito quickly recovered some self-command. "A mad old man—he looks like it—he *is* mad!" was the instantaneous thought that brought some courage with it; for he could conjecture no inward change in Baldassarre since

they had met before. He just let his eyes fall and laid the lute on the table with apparent ease ; but his fingers pinched the neck of the lute hard while he governed his head and his glance sufficiently to look with an air of quiet appeal towards Bernardo Rucellai, who said at once,—

“ Good man, what is your business ? What is the important declaration that you have to make ? ”

“ Messer Bernardo Rucellai, I wish you and your honourable friends to know in what sort of company you are sitting. There is a traitor among you.”

There was a general movement of alarm. Every one present, except Tito, thought of political danger and not of private injury.

Baldassarre began to speak as if he were thoroughly assured of what he had to say ; but, in spite of his long preparation for this moment, there was the tremor of over-mastering excitement in his voice. His passion shook him. He went on, but he did not say what he had meant to say. As he fixed his eyes on Tito again the passionate words were like blows—they defied premeditation.

“ There is a man among you who is a scoundrel, a liar, a robber. I was a father to him. I took him from beggary when he was a child. I reared him, I cherished him, I taught him, I made him a scholar. My head was lain hard that his might have a pillow. And he left me in slavery ; he sold the gems that were mine, and when I came again, he denied me.”

The last words had been uttered with almost convulsed agitation, and Baldassarre paused, trembling. All glances were turned on Tito, who was now looking straight at Baldassarre. It was a moment of desperation that annihilated all feeling in him, except the determination to risk anything for the chance of escape. And he gathered confidence from the agitation by which Baldassarre was evidently shaken. He had ceased to pinch the neck of the lute, and had thrust his thumbs into his belt, while his lips had begun to assume a slight curl. He had never yet done an act of murderous cruelty even to the smallest animal that could utter a cry, but at that moment he would have been capable of treading the breath from a smiling child for the sake of his own safety.

“What does this mean, Melema?” said Bernardo Rucellai, in a tone of cautious surprise. He, as well as the rest of the company, felt relieved that the tenor of the accusation was not political.

“Messer Bernardo,” said Tito, “I believe this man is mad. I did not recognize him the first time he encountered me in Florence, but I know now that he is the servant who years ago accompanied me and my adoptive father to Greece, and was dismissed on account of misdemeanors. His name is Jacopo di Nola. Even at that time I believe his mind was unhinged, for, without any reason, he had conceived a strange hatred towards me; and now I am convinced

that he is labouring under a mania which causes him to mistake his identity. He has already attempted my life since he has been in Florence; and I am in constant danger from him. But he is an object of pity rather than of indignation. It is too certain that my father is dead. You have only my word for it; but I must leave it to your judgment how far it is probable that a man of intellect and learning would have been lurking about in dark corners for the last month with the purpose of assassinating me; or how far it is probable that, if this man were my second father, I could have any motive for denying him. That story about my being rescued from beggary is the vision of a diseased brain. But it will be a satisfaction to me at least if you will demand from him proofs of his identity, lest any malignant person should choose to make this mad impeachment a reproach to me."

Tito had felt more and more confidence as he went on; the lie was not so difficult when it was once begun; and as the words fell easily from his lips, they gave him a sense of power such as men feel when they have begun a muscular feat successfully. In this way he acquired boldness enough to end with a challenge for proofs.

Baldassarre, while he had been walking in the gardens and afterwards waiting in an outer room of the pavilion with the servants, had been making anew the digest of the evidence he would bring to

prove his identity and Tito's baseness, recalling the description and history of his gems, and assuring himself by rapid mental glances that he could attest his learning and his travels. It might be partly owing to this nervous strain that the new shock of rage he felt as Tito's lie fell on his ears brought a strange bodily effect with it: a cold stream seemed to rush over him, and the last words of the speech seemed to be drowned by ringing chimes. Thought gave way to a dizzy horror, as if the earth were slipping away from under him. Every one in the room was looking at him as Tito ended, and saw that the eyes which had had such fierce intensity only a few minutes before had a vague fear in them. He clutched the back of a seat, and was silent.

Hardly any evidence could have been more in favour of Tito's assertion.

"Surely I have seen this man before, somewhere," said Tornabuoni.

"Certainly you have," said Tito, readily, in a low tone. "He is the escaped prisoner who clutched me on the steps of the Duomo. I did not recognize him then; he looks now more as he used to do, except that he has a more unmistakable air of mad imbecility."

"I cast no doubt on your word, Melema," said Bernardo Rucellai, with cautious gravity, "but you are right to desire some positive test of the fact." Then turning to Baldassarre, he said, "If you are

the person you claim to be, you can doubtless give some description of the gems which were your property. I myself was the purchaser of more than one gem from Messer Tito—the chief rings, I believe, in his collection. One of them is a fine sard, engraved with a subject from Homer. If, as you allege, you are a scholar, and the rightful owner of that ring, you can doubtless turn to the noted passage in Homer from which that subject is taken. Do you accept this test, Melema? or have you anything to allege against its validity? The Jacopo you speak of, was he a scholar?”

It was a fearful crisis for Tito. If he said, “Yes,” his quick mind told him that he would shake the credibility of his story: if he said, “No,” he risked everything on the uncertain extent of Baldassarre’s imbecility. But there was no noticeable pause before he said, “No. I accept the test.”

There was a dead silence while Rucellai moved towards the recess where the books were, and came back with the fine Florentine Homer in his hand. Baldassarre, when he was addressed, had turned his head towards the speaker, and Rucellai believed that he had understood him. But he chose to repeat what he had said, that there might be no mistake as to the test.

“The ring I possess,” he said, “is a fine sard, engraved with a subject from Homer. There was no other at all resembling it in Messer Tito’s collec-



tion. Will you turn to the passage in Homer from which that subject is taken? Seat yourself here," he added, laying the book on the table, and pointing to his own seat while he stood beside it.

Baldassarre had so far recovered from the first confused horror produced by the sensation of rushing coldness and chiming din in the ears as to be partly aware of what was said to him; he was aware that something was being demanded from him to prove his identity, but he formed no distinct idea of the details. The sight of the book recalled the habitual longing and faint hope that he could read and understand, and he moved towards the chair immediately.

The book was open before him, and he bent his head a little towards it, while everybody watched him eagerly. He turned no leaf. His eyes wandered over the pages that lay before him, and then fixed on them with a straining gaze. This lasted for two or three minutes in dead silence. Then he lifted his hands to each side of his head, and said, in a low tone of despair, "Lost, lost!"

There was something so piteous in the wandering look and the low cry, that while they confirmed the belief in his madness they raised compassion. Nay, so distinct sometimes is the working of a double consciousness within us, that Tito himself, while he triumphed in the apparent verification of his lie, wished that he had never made the lie necessary to himself—wished he had recognized his father on

the steps—wished he had gone to seek him—wished everything had been different. But he had borrowed from the terrible usurer Falsehood, and the loan had mounted and mounted with the years, till he belonged to the usurer, body and soul.

The compassion excited in all the witnesses was not without its danger to Tito; for conjecture is constantly guided by feeling, and more than one person suddenly conceived that this man might have been a scholar and have lost his faculties. On the other hand, they had not present to their minds the motives which could have led Tito to the denial of his benefactor, and having no ill-will towards him, it would have been difficult to them to believe that he had been uttering the basest of lies. And the originally common type of Baldassarre's person, coarsened by years of hardship, told as a confirmation of Tito's lie. If Baldassarre, to begin with, could have uttered precisely the words he had premeditated, there might have been something in the form of his accusation which would have given it the stamp not only of true experience but of mental refinement. But there had been no such testimony in his impulsive agitated words; and there seemed the very opposite testimony in the rugged face and the coarse hands that trembled beside it, standing out in strong contrast in the midst of that velvet-clad, fair-handed company.

His next movement, while he was being watched

in silence, told against him too. He took his hands from his head, and felt for something under his tunic. Every one guessed what that movement meant—guessed that there was a weapon at his side. Glances were interchanged; and Bernardo Rucellai said, in a quiet tone, touching Baldassarre's shoulder:—

“My friend, this is an important business of yours. You shall have all justice. Follow me into a private room.”

Baldassarre was still in that half-stunned state in which he was susceptible to any prompting, in the same way as an insect, that forms no conception of what the prompting leads to. He rose from his seat, and followed Rucellai out of the room.

In two or three minutes Rucellai came back again, and said,—

“He is safe under lock and key. Piero Pitti, you are one of the Magnificent Eight, what do you think of our sending Matteo to the palace for a couple of sbirri, who may escort him to the Stinche? \* If there is any danger in him, as I think there is, he will be safe there; and we can inquire about him to-morrow.”

Pitti assented, and the order was given.

“He is certainly an ill-looking fellow,” said Tornabuoni. “And you say he has attempted your life already, Melema?”

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\* The largest prison in Florence.

And the talk turned on the various forms of madness, and the fierceness of the southern blood. If the seeds of conjecture unfavourable to Tito had been planted in the mind of any one present, they were hardly strong enough to grow without the aid of much daylight and ill-will. The common-looking, wild-eyed old man, clad in serge, might have won belief without very strong evidence, if he had accused a man who was envied and disliked. As it was, the only congruous and probable view of the case seemed to be the one that sent the unpleasant accuser safely out of sight, and left the pleasant serviceable Tito just where he was before.

The subject gradually floated away, and gave place to others, till a heavy tramp, and something like the struggling of a man who was being dragged away, were heard outside. The sounds soon died out, and the interruption seemed to make the last hour's conviviality more resolute and vigorous. Every one was willing to forget a disagreeable incident.

Tito's heart was palpitating, and the wine tasted no better to him than if it had been blood.

To-night he had paid a heavier price than ever to make himself safe. He did not like the price, and yet it was inevitable that he should be glad of the purchase.

And after all he led the chorus. He was in a state of excitement in which oppressive sensations, and the wretched consciousness of something hateful

but irrevocable, were mingled with a feeling of triumph which seemed to assert itself as the feeling that would subsist and be master of the morrow.

And it *was* master. For on the morrow, as we saw, when he was about to start on his mission to Rome, he had the air of a man well satisfied with the world.

## CHAPTER XX.

## AN ARRESTING VOICE.

WHEN Romola sat down on the stone under the cypress, all things conspired to give her the sense of freedom and solitude: her escape from the accustomed walls and streets; the widening distance from her husband, who was by this time riding towards Siena, while every hour would take her farther on the opposite way; the morning stillness; the great dip of ground on the roadside making a gulf between her and the sombre calm of the mountains. For the first time in her life she felt alone in the presence of the earth and sky, with no human presence interposing and making a law for her.

Suddenly a voice close to her said,—

“You are Romola de’ Bardi, the wife of Tito Melema.”

She knew the voice: it had vibrated through her more than once before; and because she knew it, she did not turn round or look up. She sat shaken by awe, and yet inwardly rebelling against the awe. It was one of those black-skirted monks who was daring

to speak to her, and interfere with her privacy: that was all. And yet she was shaken, as if that destiny which men thought of as a sceptred deity had come to her, and grasped her with fingers of flesh.

“You are fleeing from Florence in disguise. I have a command from God to stop you. You are not permitted to flee.”

Romola's anger at the intrusion mounted higher at these imperative words. She would not turn round to look at the speaker, whose examining gaze she resented. Sitting quite motionless, she said,—

“What right have you to speak to me, or to hinder me?”

“The right of a messenger. You have put on a religious garb, and you have no religious purpose. You have sought the garb as a disguise. But you were not suffered to pass me without being discerned. It was declared to me who you were: it is declared to me that you are seeking to escape from the lot God has laid upon you. You wish your true name and your true place in life to be hidden, that you may choose for yourself a new name and a new place, and have no rule but your own will. And I have a command to call you back. My daughter, you must return to your place.”

Romola's mind rose in stronger rebellion with every sentence. She was the more determined not to show any sign of submission, because the consciousness of being inwardly shaken made her dread

lest she should fall into irresolution. She spoke with more irritation than before.

“I will not return. I acknowledge no right of priests and monks to interfere with my actions. You have no power over me.”

“I know—I know you have been brought up in scorn of obedience. But it is not the poor monk who claims to interfere with you: it is the truth that commands you. And you cannot escape it. Either you must obey it, and it will lead you; or you must disobey it, and it will hang on you with the weight of a chain which you will drag for ever. But you will obey it, my daughter. Your old servant will return to you with the mules; my companion is gone to fetch him; and you will go back to Florence.”

She started up with anger in her eyes, and faced the speaker. It was Fra Girolamo: she knew that well enough before. She was nearly as tall as he was, and their faces were almost on a level. She had started up with defiant words ready to burst from her lips, but they fell back again without utterance. She had met Fra Girolamo's calm glance, and the impression from it was so new to her, that her anger sank ashamed as something irrelevant.

There was nothing transcendent in Savonarola's face. It was not beautiful. It was strong-featured, and owed all its refinement to habits of mind and



rigid discipline of the body. The source of the impression his glance produced on Romola was the sense it conveyed to her of interest in her and care for her apart from any personal feeling. It was the first time she had encountered a gaze in which simple human fellowship expressed itself as a strongly-felt bond. Such a glance is half the vocation of the priest or spiritual guide of men, and Romola felt it impossible again to question his authority to speak to her. She stood silent, looking at him. And he spoke again.

“You assert your freedom proudly, my daughter. But who is so base as the debtor that thinks himself free?”

There was a sting in those words, and Romola's countenance changed as if a subtle pale flash had gone over it.

“And you are flying from your debts: the debt of a Florentine woman; the debt of a wife. You are turning your back on the lot that has been appointed for you—you are going to choose another. But can man or woman choose duties? No more than they can choose their birth-place or their father and mother. My daughter, you are fleeing from the presence of God into the wilderness.”

As the anger melted from Romola's mind, it had given place to a new presentiment of the strength there might be in submission, if this man, at whom she was beginning to look with a vague reverence,

had some valid law to show her. But no—it was impossible; he could not know what determined her. Yet she could not again simply refuse to be guided; she was constrained to plead; and in her new need to be reverent while she resisted, the title which she had never given him before came to her lips without forethought.

“My father, you cannot know the reasons which compel me to go. None can know them but myself. None can judge for me. I have been driven by great sorrow: I am resolved to go.”

“I know enough, my daughter: my mind has been so far illuminated concerning you, that I know enough. You are not happy in your married life; but I am not a confessor, and I seek to know nothing that should be reserved for the seal of confession. I have a divine warrant to stop you, which does not depend on such knowledge. You were warned by a message from heaven, delivered in my presence—you were warned before marriage, when you might still have lawfully chosen to be free from the marriage bond. But you chose the bond; and in wilfully breaking it—I speak to you as a pagan, if the holy mystery of matrimony is not sacred to you—you are breaking a pledge. Of what wrongs will you complain, my daughter, when you yourself are committing one of the greatest wrongs a woman and a citizen can be guilty of—withdrawing in secrecy and disguise from a pledge which you have given in the

face of God and your fellow-men? Of what wrongs will you complain, when you yourself are breaking the simplest law that lies at the foundation of the trust which binds man to man—faithfulness to the spoken word? This, then, is the wisdom you have gained by scorning the mysteries of the Church?—not to see the bare duty of integrity, where the Church would have taught you to see, not integrity only, but religion.”

The blood had rushed to Romola's face, and she shrank as if she had been stricken. “I would not have put on a disguise,” she began; but she could not go on,—she was too much shaken by the suggestion in the Frate's words of a possible affinity between her own conduct and Tito's.

“And to break that pledge you fly from Florence: Florence, where there are the only men and women in the world to whom you owe the debt of a fellow-citizen.”

“I should never have quitted Florence,” said Romola, tremulously, “as long as there was any hope of my fulfilling a duty to my father there.”

“And do you own no tie but that of a child to her father in the flesh? Your life has been spent in blindness, my daughter. You have lived with those who sit on a hill aloof, and look down on the life of their fellow-men. I know their vain discourse. It is of what has been in the times which they fill with

their own fancied wisdom, while they scorn God's work in the present. And doubtless you were taught how there were pagan women who felt what it was to live for the Republic; yet you have never felt that you, a Florentine woman, should live for Florence. If your own people are wearing a yoke, will you slip from under it, instead of struggling with them to lighten it? There is hunger and misery in our streets, yet you say, 'I care not; I have my own sorrows; I will go away, if peradventure I can ease them.' The servants of God are struggling after a law of justice, peace, and charity, that the hundred thousand citizens among whom you were born may be governed righteously; but you think no more of this than if you were a bird, that may spread its wings and fly whither it will in search of food to its liking. And yet you have scorned the teaching of the Church, my daughter. As if you, a wilful wanderer, following your own blind choice, were not below the humblest Florentine woman who stretches forth her hands with her own people, and craves a blessing for them; and feels a close sisterhood with the neighbour who kneels beside her and is not of her own blood; and thinks of the mighty purpose that God has for Florence; and waits and endures because the promised work is great, and she feels herself little."

"I was not going away to ease and self-indulgence," said Romola, raising her head again, with a prompting

to vindicate herself. "I was going away to hardship. I expect no joy: it is gone from my life."

"You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice: it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience. I say again, man cannot choose his duties. You may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth; and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty—bitter herbs, and no bread with them."

"But if you knew," said Romola, clasping her hands and pressing them tight, as she looked pleadingly at Fra Girolamo; "if you knew what it was to me—how impossible it seemed to me to bear it."

"My daughter," he said, pointing to the cord round Romola's neck, "you carry something within your mantle; draw it forth, and look at it."

Romola gave a slight start, but her impulse now was to do just what Savonarola told her. Her self-doubt was grappled by a stronger will and a stronger conviction than her own. She drew forth the crucifix. Still pointing towards it, he said,

"There, my daughter, is the image of a Supreme Offering, made by Supreme Love, because the need of man was great."

He paused, and she held the crucifix trembling—trembling under a sudden impression of the wide distance between her present and her past self. What a length of road she had travelled through since she first took that crucifix from the Frate's hands! Had life as many secrets before her still as it had for her then, in her young blindness? It was a thought that helped all other subduing influences; and at the sound of Fra Girolamo's voice again, Romola, with a quick involuntary movement, pressed the crucifix against her mantle, and looked at him with more submission than before.

“Conform your life to that image, my daughter; make your sorrow an offering: and when the fire of Divine charity burns within you, and you behold the need of your fellow-men by the light of that flame, you will not call your offering great. You have carried yourself proudly, as one who held herself not of common blood or of common thoughts; but you have been as one unborn to the true life of man. What! you say your love for your father no longer tells you to stay in Florence? Then, since that tie is snapped, you are without a law, without religion: you are no better than a beast of the field when she is robbed of her young. If the yearning of a fleshly love is gone, you are without love, without obligation. See, then, my daughter, how you are below the life of the believer who worships that image of the

Supreme Offering, and feels the glow of a common life with the lost multitude for whom that offering was made, and beholds the history of the world as the history of a great redemption in which he is himself a fellow-worker, in his own place and among his own people! If you held that faith, my beloved daughter, you would not be a wanderer flying from suffering, and blindly seeking the good of a freedom which is lawlessness. You would feel that Florence was the home of your soul as well as your birthplace, because you would see the work that was given you to do there. If you forsake your place, who will fill it? You ought to be in your place now, helping in the great work by which God will purify Florence, and raise it to be the guide of the nations. What! the earth is full of iniquity—full of groans—the light is still struggling with a mighty darkness, and you say, ‘I cannot bear my bonds; I will burst them asunder; I will go where no man claims me?’ My daughter, every bond of your life is a debt: the right lies in the payment of that debt; it can lie nowhere else. In vain will you wander over the earth; you will be wandering for ever away from the right.”

Romola was inwardly struggling with strong forces: that immense personal influence of Savonarola, which came from the energy of his emotions and beliefs; and her consciousness, surmounting all prejudice, that his words implied a higher law than any

she had yet obeyed. But the resisting thoughts were not yet overborne.

“How then could Dino be right? He broke ties. He forsook his place.”

“That was a special vocation. He was constrained to depart, else he could not have attained the higher life. It would have been stifled within him.”

“And I too”—said Romola, raising her hands to her brow, and speaking in a tone of anguish, as if she were being dragged to some torture. “Father, you may be wrong.”

“Ask your conscience, my daughter. You have no vocation such as your brother had. You are a wife. You seek to break your ties in self-will and anger, not because the higher life calls upon you to renounce them. The higher life begins for us, my daughter, when we renounce our own will to bow before a Divine law. That seems hard to you. It is the portal of wisdom, and freedom, and blessedness. And the symbol of it hangs before you. That wisdom is the religion of the cross. And you stand aloof from it: you are a pagan; you have been taught to say, ‘I am as the wise men who lived before the time when the Jew of Nazareth was crucified.’ And that is your wisdom! To be as the dead whose eyes are closed, and whose ear is deaf to the work of God that has been since their time. What has your dead wisdom done for you, my daughter? It has left you without a heart for the



neighbours among whom you dwell, without care for the great work by which Florence is to be regenerated and the world made holy; it has left you without a share in the Divine life which quenches the sense of suffering Self in the ardours of an ever-growing love. And now, when the sword has pierced your soul, you say, 'I will go away; I cannot bear my sorrow.' And you think nothing of the sorrow and the wrong that are within the walls of the city where you dwell: you would leave your place empty, when it ought to be filled with your pity and your labour. If there is wickedness in the streets, your steps should shine with the light of purity: if there is a cry of anguish, you, my daughter, because you know the meaning of the cry, should be there to still it. My beloved daughter, sorrow has come to teach you a new worship: the sign of it hangs before you."

Romola's mind was still torn by conflict. She foresaw that she should obey Savonarola and go back: his words had come to her as if they were an interpretation of that revulsion from self-satisfied ease, and of that new fellowship with suffering, which had already been awakened in her. His arresting voice had brought a new condition into her life, which made it seem impossible to her that she could go on her way as if she had not heard it; yet she shrank as one who sees the path she must take, but sees, too, that the hot lava lies there. And the

instinctive shrinking from a return to her husband brought doubts. She turned away her eyes from Fra Girolamo, and stood for a minute or two with her hands hanging clasped before her, like a statue. At last she spoke, as if the words were being wrung from her, still looking on the ground,

“My husband . . . . he is not . . . . my love is gone!”

“My daughter, there is the bond of a higher love. Marriage is not carnal only, made for selfish delight. See what that thought leads you to! It leads you to wander away in a false garb from all the obligations of your place and name. That would not have been, if you had learned that it is a sacramental vow, from which none but God can release you. My daughter, your life is not as a grain of sand, to be blown by the winds; it is a thing of flesh and blood, that dies if it be sundered. Your husband is not a malefactor?”

Romola started. “Heaven forbid! No; I accuse him of nothing.”

“I did not suppose he was a malefactor. I meant, that if he were a malefactor, your place would be in the prison beside him. My daughter, if the cross comes to you as a wife, you must carry it as a wife. You may say, ‘I will forsake my husband,’ but you cannot cease to be a wife.”

“Yet if—oh, how could I bear——” Romola had

involuntarily begun to say something which she sought to banish from her mind again.

“Make your marriage-sorrows an offering too, my daughter: an offering to the great work by which sin and sorrow are being made to cease. The end is sure, and is already beginning. Here in Florence it is beginning, and the eyes of faith behold it. And it may be our blessedness to die for it: to die daily by the crucifixion of our selfish will—to die at last by laying our bodies on the altar. My daughter, you are a child of Florence; fulfil the duties of that great inheritance. Live for Florence—for your own people, whom God is preparing to bless the earth. Bear the anguish and the smart. The iron is sharp—I know, I know—it rends the tender flesh. The draught is bitterness on the lips. But there is rapture in the cup—there is the vision which makes all life below it dross for ever. Come, my daughter, come back to your place!”

While Savonarola spoke with growing intensity, his arms tightly folded before him still, as they had been from the first, but his face alight as from an inward flame, Romola felt herself surrounded and possessed by the glow of his passionate faith. The chill doubts all melted away; she was subdued by the sense of something unspeakably great to which she was being called by a strong being who roused a new strength within herself. In a voice that was like a low, prayerful cry, she said—

“Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back.”

Almost unconsciously she sank on her knees. Savonarola stretched out his hands over her; but feeling would no longer pass through the channel of speech, and he was silent.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## COMING BACK.

“RISE, my daughter,” said Fra Girolamo at last. “Your servant is waiting not far off with the mules. It is time that I should go onward to Florence.”

Romola arose from her knees. That silent attitude had been a sort of sacrament to her, confirming the state of yearning passivity on which she had newly entered. By the one act of renouncing her resolve to quit her husband, her will seemed so utterly bruised that she felt the need of direction even in small things. She lifted up the edge of her cowl, and saw Maso and the second Dominican standing with their backs towards her on the edge of the hill about ten yards from her; but she looked at Savonarola again without speaking, as if the order to Maso to turn back must come from him and not from her.

“I will go and call them,” he said, answering her glance of appeal; “and I will recommend you, my daughter, to the Brother who is with me. You

desire to put yourself under guidance, and to learn that wisdom which has been hitherto as foolishness to you. A chief gate of that wisdom is the sacrament of confession. You will need a confessor, my daughter, and I desire to put you under the care of Fra Salvestro, one of the brethren of San Marco in whom I most confide."

"I would rather have no guidance but yours, father," said Romola, looking anxious.

"My daughter, I do not act as a confessor. The vocation I have withdraws me from offices that would force me into frequent contact with the laity, and interfere with my special duties."

"Then shall I not be able to speak to you in private? if I waver, if——" Romola broke off from rising agitation. She felt a sudden alarm lest her new strength in renunciation should vanish if the immediate personal influence of Savonarola vanished.

"My daughter, if your soul has need of the word in private from my lips, you will let me know it through Fra Salvestro, and I will see you in the sacristy or in the choir of San Marco. And I will not cease to watch over you. I will instruct my brother concerning you, that he may guide you into that path of labour for the suffering and the hungry to which you are called as a daughter of Florence in these times of hard need. I desire to behold you among the feebler and more ignorant sisters as the

apple-tree among the trees of the forest, so that your fairness and all natural gifts may be but as a lamp through which the Divine light shines the more purely. I will go now and call your servant."

When Maso had been sent a little way in advance, Fra Salvestro came forward, and Savonarola led Romola towards him. She had beforehand felt an inward shrinking from a new guide who was a total stranger to her; but to have resisted Savonarola's advice would have been to assume an attitude of independence at a moment when all her strength must be drawn from the renunciation of independence. And the whole bent of her mind now was towards doing what was painful rather than what was easy. She bowed reverently to Fra Salvestro before looking directly at him; but when she raised her head and saw him fully, her reluctance became a palpitating doubt. There are men whose presence infuses trust and reverence; there are others to whom we have need to carry our trust and reverence ready made; and that difference flashed on Romola as she ceased to have Savonarola before her, and saw in his stead Fra Salvestro Maruffi. It was not that there was anything manifestly repulsive in Fra Salvestro's face and manner, any air of hypocrisy, any tinge of coarseness; his face was handsomer than Fra Girolamo's, his person a little taller. He was the long-accepted confessor of many

among the chief personages in Florence, and had therefore had large experience as a spiritual director. But his face had the vacillating expression of a mind unable to concentrate itself strongly in the channel of one great emotion or belief, an expression which is fatal to influence over an ardent nature like Romola's. Such an expression is not the stamp of insincerity; it is the stamp simply of a shallow soul, which will often be found sincerely striving to fill a high vocation, sincerely composing its countenance to the utterance of sublime formulas, but finding the muscles twitch or relax in spite of belief, as prose insists in coming instead of poetry to the man who has not the divine frenzy. Fra Salvestro had a peculiar liability to visions, dependent apparently on a constitution given to somnambulism. Savonarola believed in the supernatural character of these visions, while Fra Salvestro himself had originally resisted such an interpretation of them, and had even rebuked Savonarola for his prophetic preaching. Another proof, if one were wanted, that the relative greatness of men is not to be gauged by their tendency to disbelieve the superstitions of their age. For of these two there can be no question which was the great man and which the small.

The difference between them was measured very accurately by the change in Romola's feeling as Fra Salvestro began to address her in words of exhortation and encouragement. After her first angry resistance



of Savonarola had passed away, she had lost all remembrance of the old dread lest any influence should drag her within the circle of fanaticism and sour monkish piety. But now again, the chill breath of that dread stole over her. It could have no decisive effect against the impetus her mind had just received; it was only like the closing of the grey clouds over the sunrise, which made her returning path monotonous and sombre.

And perhaps of all sombre paths that on which we go back after treading it with a strong resolution is the one that most severely tests the fervour of renunciation. As they re-entered the city gates the light snow-flakes fell about them; and as the grey sister walked hastily homeward from the Piazza di San Marco, and trod the bridge again, and turned in at the large door in the Via de' Bardi, her footsteps were marked darkly on the thin carpet of snow, and her cowl fell laden and damp about her face.

She went up to her room, threw off her serge, destroyed the parting letters, replaced all her precious trifles, unbound her hair, and put on her usual black dress. Instead of taking a long exciting journey, she was to sit down in her usual place. The snow fell against the windows, and she was alone.

She felt the dreariness, yet her courage was high, like that of a seeker who has come on new signs of gold. She was going to thread life by a fresh clue. She had thrown all the energy of her will into

renunciation. The empty tabernacle remained locked, and she placed Dino's crucifix outside it.

Nothing broke the outward monotony of her solitary home, till the night came like a white ghost at the windows. Yet it was the most memorable Christmas-eve in her life to Romola, this of 1494.

## B O O K   I I I .



## CHAPTER XXII.

## ROMOLA IN HER PLACE.

It was the thirtieth of October, 1496. The sky that morning was clear enough, and there was a pleasant autumnal breeze. But the Florentines just then thought very little about the land breezes: they were thinking of the gales at sea, which seemed to be uniting with all other powers to disprove the Frate's declaration that Heaven took special care of Florence.

For those terrible gales had driven away from the coast of Leghorn certain ships from Marseilles, freighted with soldiery and corn; and Florence was in the direst need, first of food, and secondly of fighting men. Pale Famine was in her streets, and her territory was threatened on all its borders.

For the French king, that new Charlemagne, who had entered Italy in anticipatory triumph, and had

conquered Naples without the least trouble, had gone away again fifteen months ago, and was even, it was feared, in his grief for the loss of a new-born son, losing the languid intention of coming back again to redress grievances and set the Church in order. A league had been formed against him—a Holy League, with Pope Borgia at its head—to “drive out the barbarians,” who still garrisoned the fortress of Naples. That had a patriotic sound; but, looked at more closely, the Holy League seemed very much like an agreement among certain wolves to drive away all other wolves, and then to see which among themselves could snatch the largest share of the prey. And there was a general disposition to regard Florence not as a fellow wolf, but rather as a desirable carcase. Florence, therefore, of all the chief Italian States, had alone declined to join the League, adhering still to the French alliance.

She had declined at her peril. At this moment Pisa, still fighting savagely for liberty, was being encouraged not only by strong forces from Venice and Milan, but by the presence of the German Emperor Maximilian, who had been invited by the League, and was joining the Pisans with such troops as he had in the attempt to get possession of Leghorn, while the coast was invested by Venetian and Genoese ships. And if Leghorn should fall into the hands of the enemy, woe to Florence! For if that one outlet towards the sea were closed, hedged in as

she was on the land by the bitter ill-will of the Pope and the jealousy of smaller States, how could succours reach her?

The government of Florence had shown a great heart in this urgent need, meeting losses and defeats with vigorous effort, raising fresh money, raising fresh soldiers, but not neglecting the good old method of Italian defence—conciliatory embassies. And while the scarcity of food was every day becoming greater, they had resolved, in opposition to old precedent, not to shut out the starving country people, and the mendicants driven from the gates of other cities, who came flocking to Florence like birds from a land of snow.

These acts of a government in which the disciples of Savonarola made the strongest element were not allowed to pass without criticism. The disaffected were plentiful, and they saw clearly that the government took the worst course for the public welfare. Florence ought to join the League and make common cause with the other great Italian States, instead of drawing down their hostility by a futile adherence to a foreign ally. Florence ought to take care of her own citizens, instead of opening her gates to famine and pestilence in the shape of starving contadini and alien mendicants.

Every day the distress became sharper: every day the murmurs became louder. And, to crown the difficulties of the government, for a month and more—in obedience to a mandate from Rome—Fra

Girolamo had ceased to preach. But on the arrival of the terrible news that the ships from Marseilles had been driven back, and that no corn was coming, the need for the voice that could infuse faith and patience into the people became too imperative to be resisted. In defiance of the Papal mandate the Signoria requested Savonarola to preach. And two days ago he had mounted again the pulpit of the Duomo, and had told the people only to wait and be steadfast and the divine help would certainly come.

It was a bold sermon: he consented to have his frock stripped off him if, when Florence persevered in fulfilling the duties of piety and citizenship, God did not come to her rescue.

Yet at present, on this morning of the thirtieth, there were no signs of rescue. Perhaps if the precious Tabernacle of the Madonna dell' Impruneta were brought into Florence and carried in devout procession to the Duomo, that Mother, rich in sorrows and therefore in mercy, would plead for the suffering city? For a century and a half there were records how the Florentines, suffering from drought, or flood, or famine, or pestilence, or the threat of wars, had fetched the potent image within their walls, and had found deliverance. And grateful honour had been done to her and her ancient church of L'Impruneta; the high house of Buondelmonti, patrons of the church, had to guard her hidden image with bare sword; wealth had been poured out

for prayers at her shrine, for chantings, and chapels, and ever-burning lights; and lands had been added, till there was much quarrelling for the privilege of serving her. The Florentines were deeply convinced of her graciousness to them, so that the sight of her tabernacle within their walls was like the parting of the cloud, and the proverb ran, that the Florentines had a Madonna who would do what they pleased.

When were they in more need of her pleading pity than now? And already, the evening before, the tabernacle containing the miraculous hidden image had been brought with high and reverend escort from L'Impruneta, the privileged spot six miles beyond the gate of San Piero that looks towards Rome, and had been deposited in the church of San Gaggio, outside the gate, whence it was to be fetched in solemn procession by all the fraternities, trades, and authorities of Florence.

But the Pitying Mother had not yet entered within the walls, and the morning arose on unchanged misery and despondency. Pestilence was hovering in the track of famine. Not only the hospitals were full, but the courtyards of private houses had been turned into refuges and infirmaries; and still there was unsheltered want. And early this morning, as usual, members of the various fraternities who made it part of their duty to bury the unfriended dead, were bearing away the corpses that had sunk by the wayside. As usual, sweet womanly forms, with the refined air

and carriage of the well-born, but in the plainest garb, were moving about the streets on their daily errands of tending the sick and relieving the hungry.

One of these forms was easily distinguishable as Romola de' Bardi. Clad in the simplest garment of black serge, with a plain piece of black drapery drawn over her head, so as to hide all her hair, except the bands of gold that rippled apart on her brow, she was advancing from the Ponte Vecchio towards the Por' Santa Maria—the street in a direct line with the bridge—when she found her way obstructed by the pausing of a bier, which was being carried by members of the company of San Jacopo del Popolo, in search for the unburied dead. The brethren at the head of the bier were stooping to examine something, while a group of idle workmen, with features paled and sharpened by hunger, were clustering around and all talking at once.

“He's dead, I tell you! Messer Domeneddio has loved him well enough to take him.”

“Ah, and it would be well for us all if we could have our legs stretched out and go with our heads two or three *bracci* foremost! It's ill standing upright with hunger to prop you.”

“Well, well, he's an old fellow. Death has got a poor bargain. Life's had the best of him.”

“And no Florentine, ten to one! A beggar turned out of Siena. San Giovanni defend us! They've no



need of soldiers to fight us. They send us an army of starving men."

"No, no! This man is one of the prisoners turned out of the Stinche. I know by the grey patch where the prison badge was."

"Keep quiet! Lend a hand! Don't you see the brethren are going to lift him on the bier?"

"It's likely he's alive enough if he could only look it. The soul may be inside him if it had only a drop of *vernaccia* to warm it."

"In truth, I think he is not dead," said one of the brethren, when they had lifted him on the bier. "He has perhaps only sunk down for want of food."

"Let me try to give him some wine," said Romola, coming forward. She loosened the small flask which she carried at her belt, and, leaning towards the prostrate body, with a deft hand she applied a small ivory implement between the teeth, and poured into the mouth a few drops of wine. The stimulus acted: the wine was evidently swallowed. She poured more, till the head was moved a little towards her, and the eyes of the old man opened full upon her with the vague look of returning consciousness.

Then for the first time a sense of complete recognition came over Romola. Those wild dark eyes opening in the sallow deep-lined face, with the white beard, which was now long again, were like an unmistakable signature to a remembered handwriting. The light of two summers had not made that image

any fainter in Romola's memory: the image of the escaped prisoner, whom she had seen in the Duomo the day when Tito first wore the armour—at whose grasp Tito was paled with terror in the strange sketch she had seen in Piero's studio. A wretched tremor and palpitation seized her. Now at last, perhaps, she was going to know some secret which might be more bitter than all that had gone before. She felt an impulse to dart away as from some sight of horror; and again, a more imperious need to keep close by the side of this old man whom, the divination of keen feeling told her, her husband had injured. In the very instant of this conflict she still leaned towards him and kept her right hand ready to administer more wine, while her left was passed under his neck. Her hands trembled, but their habit of soothing helpfulness would have served to guide them without the direction of her thought.

Baldassarre was looking at *her* for the first time. The close seclusion in which Romola's trouble had kept her in the weeks preceding her flight and his arrest, had denied him the opportunity he had sought of seeing the Wife who lived in the Via de' Bardi: and at this moment the descriptions he had heard of the fair golden-haired woman were all gone, like yesterday's waves.

“Will it not be well to carry him to the steps of San Stefano?” said Romola. “We shall cease then

to stop up the street, and you can go on your way with your bier."

They had only to move onward for about thirty yards before reaching the steps of San Stefano, and by this time Baldassarre was able himself to make some efforts towards getting off the bier, and propping himself on the steps against the church doorway. The charitable brethren passed on, but the group of interested spectators, who had nothing to do and much to say, had considerably increased. The feeling towards the old man was not so entirely friendly now it was quite certain that he was alive, but the respect inspired by Romola's presence caused the passing remarks to be made in a rather more subdued tone than before.

"Ah, they gave him his morsel every day in the Stinche—that's why he can't do so well without it. You and I, Cecco, know better what it is to go to bed fasting."

"*Gnaffè!* that's why the Magnificent Eight have turned out some of the prisoners, that they may shelter honest people instead. But if every thief is to be brought to life with good wine and wheaten bread, we Ciompi had better go and fill ourselves in Arno while the water's plenty."

Romola had seated herself on the steps by Baldassarre, and was saying, "Can you eat a little bread now? perhaps by-and-by you will be able, if I leave it with you. I must go on, because I have promised

to be at the hospital. But I will come back if you will wait here, and then I will take you to some shelter. Do you understand? Will you wait? I will come back."

He looked dreamily at her, and repeated her words, "come back." It was no wonder that his mind was enfeebled by his bodily exhaustion, but she hoped that he apprehended her meaning. She opened her basket, which was filled with pieces of soft bread, and put one of the pieces into his hand.

"Do you keep your bread for those that can't swallow, madonna?" said a rough-looking fellow, in a red night-cap, who had elbowed his way into the inmost circle of spectators—a circle that was pressing rather closely on Romola.

"If anybody isn't hungry," said another, "I say, let him alone. He's better off than people who've got craving stomachs and no breakfast."

"Yes, indeed; if a man's a mind to die, it's a time to encourage him, instead of making him come back to life against his will. Dead men want no trencher."

"Oh, you don't understand the Frate's charity," said a young man in an excellent cloth tunic, whose face showed no signs of want. "The Frate has been preaching to the birds, like Saint Anthony, and he's been telling the hawks they were made to feed the sparrows, as every good Florentine citizen was made to feed six starving beggarmen from Arezzo or Bologna. Madonna, there, is a pious Piagnone: she's

not going to throw away her good bread on honest citizens who've got all the Frate's prophecies to swallow."

"Come, madonna," said he of the red cap, "the old thief doesn't eat the bread, you see: you'd better try *us*. We fast so much, we're half saints already."

The circle had narrowed till the coarse men—most of them gaunt from privation—had left hardly any margin round Romola. She had been taking from her basket a small horn cup, into which she put the piece of bread and just moistened it with wine; and hitherto she had not appeared to heed them. But now she rose to her feet, and looked round at them. Instinctively the men who were nearest to her pushed backward a little, as if their rude nearness were the fault of those behind. Romola held out the basket of bread to the man in the night-cap, looking at him without any reproach in her glance, as she said,—

"Hunger is hard to bear, I know, and you have the power to take this bread if you will. It was saved for sick women and children. You are strong men; but if you do not choose to suffer because you are strong, you have the power to take everything from the weak. You can take the bread from this basket; but I shall watch by this old man; I shall resist your taking the bread from *him*."

For a few moments there was perfect silence, while Romola looked at the faces before her, and held out the basket of bread. Her own pale face had the

slightly pinched look and the deepening of the eye-socket which indicate unusual fasting in the habitually temperate, and the large direct gaze of her hazel eyes was all the more impressive.

The man in the night-cap looked rather silly, and backed, thrusting his elbow into his neighbour's ribs with an air of moral rebuke. The backing was general, every one wishing to imply that he had been pushed forward against his will; and the young man in the fine cloth tunic had disappeared.

But at this moment the armed servitors of the Signoria, who had begun to patrol the line of streets through which the procession was to pass, came up to disperse the group which was obstructing the narrow street. The man addressed as Cecco retreated from a threatening mace up the church steps, and said to Romola, in a respectful tone,—

“Madonna, if you want to go on your errands, I'll take care of the old man.”

Cecco was a wild-looking figure: a very ragged tunic, made shaggy and variegated by cloth-dust and clinging fragments of wool, gave relief to a pair of bare bony arms and a long sinewy neck; his square jaw shaded by a bristly black beard, his bridgeless nose and low forehead, made his face look as if it had been crushed down for purposes of packing, and a narrow piece of red rag tied over his ears seemed to assist in the compression. Romola looked at him with some hesitation.

“Don’t distrust me, madonna,” said Cecco, who understood her look perfectly; “I’m not so pretty as you, but I’ve got an old mother who eats my porridge for me. What! there’s a heart inside me, and I’ve bought a candle for the most Holy Virgin before now. Besides, see there, the old fellow is eating his sop. He’s hale enough: he’ll be on his legs as well as the best of us by-and-by.”

“Thank you for offering to take care of him, friend,” said Romola, rather penitent for her doubting glance. Then leaning to Baldassarre, she said, “Pray wait for me till I come again.”

He assented with a slight movement of the head and hand, and Romola went on her way towards the hospital of San Matteo, in the Piazza di San Marco.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE UNSEEN MADONNA.

IN returning from the hospital, more than an hour later, Romola took a different road, making a wider circuit towards the river, which she reached at some distance from the Ponte Vecchio. She turned her steps towards that bridge, intending to hasten to San Stefano in search of Baldassarre. She dreaded to know more about him, yet she felt as if, in forsaking him, she would be forsaking some near claim upon her.

But when she approached the meeting of the roads where the Por' Santa Maria would be on her right hand and the Ponte Vecchio on her left, she found herself involved in a crowd who suddenly fell on their knees; and she immediately knelt with them. The Cross was passing—the Great Cross of the Duomo—which headed the procession. Romola was later than she had expected to be, and now she must wait till the procession had passed. As she rose from her knees, when the Cross had disappeared, the return to a standing posture, with nothing to do but



gaze, made her more conscious of her fatigue than she had been while she had been walking and occupied. A shopkeeper by her side said,—

“Madonna Romola, you will be weary of standing: Gian Fantoni will be glad to give you a seat in his house. Here is his door close at hand. Let me open it for you. What! he loves God and the Frate as we do. His house is yours.”

Romola was accustomed now to be addressed in this fraternal way by ordinary citizens, whose faces were familiar to her from her having seen them constantly in the Duomo. The idea of home had come to be identified for her less with the house in the Via de' Bardi, where she sat in frequent loneliness, than with the towered circuit of Florence, where there was hardly a turn of the streets at which she was not greeted with looks of appeal or of friendliness. She was glad enough to pass through the open door on her right hand and be led by the fraternal hose-vender to an upstairs-window, where a stout woman with three children, all in the plain garb of Piagnoni, made a place for her with much reverence above the bright hanging draperies. From this corner station she could see, not only the procession pouring in solemn slowness between the lines of houses on the Ponte Vecchio, but also the river and the Lung' Arno on towards the bridge of the Santa Trinità.

In sadness and in stillness came the slow procession. Not even a wailing chant broke the silent

appeal for mercy: there was only the tramp of footsteps, and the faint sweep of woollen garments. They were young footsteps that were passing when Romola first looked from the window—a long train of the Florentine youth, bearing high in the midst of them the white image of the youthful Jesus, with a golden glory above his head, standing by the tall cross where the thorns and the nails lay ready.

After that train of fresh beardless faces came the mysterious-looking Companies of Discipline, bound by secret rules to self-chastisement, and devout praise, and special acts of piety; all wearing a garb which concealed the whole head and face except the eyes. Every one knew that these mysterious forms were Florentine citizens of various ranks, who might be seen at ordinary times going about the business of the shop, the counting-house, or the State; but no member now was discernible as son, husband, or father. They had dropped their personality, and walked as symbols of a common vow. Each company had its colour and its badge, but the garb of all was a complete shroud, and left no expression but that of fellowship.

In comparison with them, the multitude of monks seemed to be strongly distinguished individuals, in spite of the common tonsure and the common frock. First came a white stream of reformed Benedictines; and then a much longer stream of the Frati Minori, or Franciscans, in that age all clad in grey, with the

knotted cord round their waists, and some of them with the *zoccoli*, or wooden sandals, below their bare feet;—perhaps the most numerous order in Florence, owning many zealous members who loved mankind and hated the Dominicans. And after the grey came the black of the Augustinians of San Spirito, with more cultured human faces above it—men who had inherited the library of Boccaccio, and had made the most learned company in Florence when learning was rarer; then the white over dark of the Carmelites; and then again the unmixed black of the Servites, that famous Florentine order founded by seven merchants who forsook their gains to adore the Divine Mother.

And now the hearts of all on-lookers began to beat a little faster, either with hatred or with love, for there was a stream of black and white coming over the bridge—of black mantles over white scapularies; and every one knew that the Dominicans were coming. Those of Fiesole passed first. One black mantle parted by white after another, one tonsured head after another, and still expectation was suspended. They were very coarse mantles, all of them, and many were threadbare, if not ragged; for the Prior of San Marco had reduced the fraternities under his rule to the strictest poverty and discipline. But in the long line of black and white there was at last singled out a mantle only a little more worn than the rest, with a tonsured head above it which

might not have appeared supremely remarkable to a stranger who had not seen it on bronze medals, with the sword of God as its obverse; or surrounded by an armed guard on the way to the Duomo; or transfigured by the inward flame of the orator as it looked round on a rapt multitude.

As the approach of Savonarola was discerned, none dared conspicuously to break the stillness by a sound which would rise above the solemn tramp of footsteps and the faint sweep of garments; nevertheless his ear, as well as other ears, caught a mingled sound of low hissing that longed to be curses, and murmurs that longed to be blessings. Perhaps it was the sense that the hissing predominated which made two or three of his disciples in the foreground of the crowd, at the meeting of the roads, fall on their knees as if something divine were passing. The movement of silent homage spread: it went along the sides of the streets like a subtle shock, leaving some unmoved, while it made the most bend the knee and bow the head. But the hatred, too, gathered a more intense expression; and as Savonarola passed up the Por' Santa Maria, Romola could see that some one at an upper window spat upon him.

Monks again—*Fрати Umiliati*, or Humbled Brethren, from *Ognissanti*, with a glorious tradition of being the earliest workers in the wool-trade; and again more monks—*Vallombrosan* and other varieties

of Benedictines, reminding the instructed eye by niceties of form and colour that in ages of abuse, long ago, reformers had arisen who had marked a change of spirit by a change of garb; till at last the shaven crowns were at an end, and there came the train of untonsured secular priests.

Then followed the twenty-one incorporated Arts of Florence in long array, with their banners floating above them in proud declaration that the bearers had their distinct functions, from the bakers of bread to the judges and notaries. And then all the secondary officers of State, beginning with the less and going on to the greater, till the line of secularities was broken by the Canons of the Duomo, carrying a sacred relic—the very head, enclosed in silver, of San Zenobio, immortal bishop of Florence, whose virtues were held to have saved the city perhaps a thousand years before.

Here was the nucleus of the procession. Behind the relic came the archbishop in gorgeous cope, with canopy held above him; and after him the mysterious hidden Image—hidden first by rich curtains of brocade enclosing an outer painted tabernacle, but within this, by the more ancient tabernacle which had never been opened in the memory of living men, or the fathers of living men. In that inner shrine was the image of the Pitying Mother, found ages ago in the soil of L'Impruneta, uttering a cry as the spade struck it. Hitherto the unseen Image had hardly

ever been carried to the Duomo without having rich gifts borne before it. There was no reciting the list of precious offerings made by emulous men and communities, especially of veils and curtains and mantles. But the richest of all these, it was said, had been given by a poor abbess and her nuns, who, having no money to buy materials, wove a mantle of gold brocade with their prayers, embroidered it and adorned it with their prayers, and, finally, saw their work presented to the Blessed Virgin in the great Piazza by two beautiful youths who spread out white wings and vanished in the blue.

But to-day there were no gifts carried before the tabernacle: no donations were to be given to-day except to the poor. That had been the advice of Fra Girolamo, whose preaching never insisted on gifts to the invisible powers, but only on help to visible need; and altars had been raised at various points in front of the churches, on which the oblations for the poor were deposited. Not even a torch was carried. Surely the hidden Mother cared less for torches and brocade than for the wail of the hungry people. Florence was in extremity: she had done her utmost, and could only wait for something divine that was not in her own power.

The Frate in the torn mantle had said that help would certainly come, and many of the faint-hearted were clinging more to their faith in the Frate's word, than to their faith in the virtues of the unseen Image.

But there were not a few of the fierce-hearted who thought with secret rejoicing that the Frate's word might be proved false.

Slowly the tabernacle moved forward, and knees were bent. There was profound stillness; for the train of priests and chaplains from L'Impruneta stirred no passion in the on-lookers. The procession was about to close with the Priors and the Gonfaloniere; the long train of companies and symbols, which have their silent music and stir the mind as a chorus stirs it, was passing out of sight, and now a faint yearning hope was all that struggled with the accustomed despondency.

Romola, whose heart had been swelling, half with foreboding, half with that enthusiasm of fellowship which the life of the last two years had made as habitual to her as the consciousness of costume to a vain and idle woman, gave a deep sigh, as at the end of some long mental tension, and remained on her knees for very languor; when suddenly there flashed from between the houses on to the distant bridge something bright-coloured. In the instant, Romola started up and stretched out her arms, leaning from the window, while the black drapery fell from her head, and the golden gleam of her hair and the flush in her face seemed the effect of one illumination. A shout arose in the same instant; the last troops of the procession paused, and all faces were turned towards the distant bridge.

But the bridge was passed now ; the horseman was pressing at full gallop along by the Arno ; the sides of his bay horse, just streaked with foam, looked all white from swiftness ; his cap was flying loose by his red becchetto, and he waved an olive branch in his hand. It was a messenger—a messenger of good tidings ! The blessed olive branch spoke afar off. But the impatient people could not wait. They rushed to meet the on-comer, and seized his horse's rein, pushing and trampling.

And now Romola could see that the horseman was her husband, who had been sent to Pisa a few days before on a private embassy. The recognition brought no new flash of joy into her eyes. She had checked her first impulsive attitude of expectation ; but her governing anxiety was still to know what news of relief had come for Florence.

“ Good news ! ” “ Best news ! ” “ News to be paid with hose (*novelle da calze*) ! ” were the vague answers with which Tito met the importunities of the crowd, until he had succeeded in pushing on his horse to the spot at the meeting of the ways where the Gonfaloniere and the Priors were awaiting him. There he paused, and, bowing low, said :—

“ Magnificent Signori ! I have to deliver to you the joyful news that the galleys from France, laden with corn and men, have arrived safely in the port of Leghorn, by favour of a strong wind, which kept the enemy's fleet at a distance.”



The words had no sooner left Tito's lips than they seemed to vibrate up the streets. A great shout rang through the air, and rushed along the river; and then another, and another; and the shouts were heard spreading along the line of the procession towards the Duomo; and then there were fainter answering shouts, like the intermediate splash of distant waves in a great lake whose waters obey one impulse.

For some minutes there was no attempt to speak further: the Signoria themselves lifted up their caps, and stood bare-headed in the presence of a rescue which had come from outside the limit of their own power—from that region of trust and resignation which has been in all ages called divine.

At last, as the signal was given to move forward, Tito said, with a smile,—

“I ought to say, that any hose to be bestowed by the Magnificent Signoria in reward of these tidings, are due, not to me, but to another man who had ridden hard to bring them, and would have been here in my place if his horse had not broken down just before he reached Signa. Meo di Sasso will doubtless be here in an hour or two, and may all the more justly claim the glory of the messenger, because he has had the chief labour and has lost the chief delight.”

It was a graceful way of putting a necessary statement, and after a word of reply from the

*Proposto*, or spokesman of the Signoria, this dignified extremity of the procession passed on, and Tito turned his horse's head to follow in its train, while the great bell of the Palazzo Vecchio was already beginning to swing, and give a louder voice to the people's joy.

In that moment, when Tito's attention had ceased to be imperatively directed, it might have been expected that he would look round and recognize Romola; but he was apparently engaged with his cap, which, now the eager people were leading his horse, he was able to seize and place on his head, while his right hand was still encumbered with the olive branch. He had a becoming air of lassitude after his exertions; and Romola, instead of making any effort to be recognized by him, threw her black drapery over her head again, and remained perfectly quiet. Yet she felt almost sure that Tito had seen her; he had the power of seeing everything without seeming to see it.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE VISIBLE MADONNA.

THE crowd had no sooner passed onward than Romola descended to the street, and hastened to the steps of San Stefano. Cecco had been attracted with the rest towards the Piazza, and she found Baldassarre standing alone against the church door, with the horn-cup in his hand, waiting for her. There was a striking change in him: the blank, dreamy glance of a half-retained consciousness had given place to a fierceness which, as she advanced and spoke to him, flashed upon her as if she had been its object. It was the glance of caged fury that sees its prey passing safe beyond the bars.

Romola started as the glance was turned on her, but her immediate thought was that he had seen Tito. And as she felt the look of hatred grating on her, something like a hope arose that this man might be the criminal, and that her husband might not have been guilty towards him. If she could learn that now, by bringing Tito face to face with him, and have her mind set at rest!

“If you will come with me,” she said, “I can give you shelter and food until you are quite rested and strong. Will you come?”

“Yes,” said Baldassarre, “I shall be glad to get my strength. I want to get my strength,” he repeated, as if he were muttering to himself, rather than speaking to her.

“Come!” she said, inviting him to walk by her side, and taking the way by the Arno towards the Ponte Rubaconte as the more private road.

“I think you are not a Florentine,” she said, presently, as they turned on to the bridge.

He looked round at her without speaking. His suspicious caution was more strongly upon him than usual, just now that the fog of confusion and oblivion was made denser by bodily feebleness. But she was looking at him too, and there was something in her gentle eyes which at last compelled him to answer her. But he answered cautiously,—

“No, I am no Florentine; I am a lonely man.”

She observed his reluctance to speak to her, and dared not question him further, lest he should desire to quit her. As she glanced at him from time to time, her mind was busy with thoughts which quenched the faint hope that there was nothing painful to be revealed about her husband. If this old man had been in the wrong, where was the cause for dread and secrecy?

They walked on in silence till they reached the

entrance into the Via de' Bardi, and Romola noticed that he turned and looked at her with a sudden movement as if some shock had passed through him. A few moments after she paused at the half-open door of the court and turned towards him.

"Ah!" he said, not waiting for her to speak, "you are his wife."

"Whose wife?" said Romola.

It would have been impossible for Baldassarre to recall any name at that moment. The very force with which the image of Tito pressed upon him seemed to expel any verbal sign. He made no answer, but looked at her with strange fixedness.

She opened the door wide and showed the court covered with straw, on which lay four or five sick people, while some little children crawled or sat on it at their ease—tiny pale creatures, biting straws and gurgling.

"If you will come in," said Romola, tremulously, "I will find you a comfortable place, and bring you some more food."

"No, I will not come in," said Baldassarre. But he stood still, arrested by the burden of impressions under which his mind was too confused to choose a course.

"Can I do nothing for you?" said Romola. "Let me give you some money that you may buy food. It will be more plentiful soon."

She had put her hand into her scarsella as she

spoke, and held out her palm with several *grossi* in it. She purposely offered him more than she would have given to any other man in the same circumstances. He looked at the coins a little while, and then said,——

“ Yes, I will take them.”

She poured the coins into his palm, and he grasped them tightly.

“ Tell me,” said Romola, almost beseechingly. “ What shall you——”

But Baldassarre had turned away from her, and was walking again towards the bridge. Passing from it, straight on up the Via del Fosso, he came upon the shop of Niccolò Caparra, and turned towards it without a pause, as if it had been the very object of his search. Niccolò was at that moment in procession with the armourers of Florence, and there was only one apprentice in the shop. But there were all sorts of weapons in abundance hanging there, and Baldassarre’s eyes discerned what he was more hungry for than for bread. Niccolò himself would probably have refused to sell anything that might serve as a weapon to this man with signs of the prison on him; but the apprentice, less observant and scrupulous, took three *grossi* for a sharp hunting-knife without any hesitation. It was a conveniently small weapon, which Baldassarre could easily thrust within the breast of his tunic, and he walked on, feeling stronger. That sharp edge might give deadliness to the thrust

of an aged arm: at least it was a companion, it was a power in league with him, even if it failed. It would break against armour, but was the armour sure to be always there? In those long months while vengeance had lain in prison, baseness had perhaps become forgetful and secure. The knife had been bought with the traitor's own money. That was just. Before he took the money, he had felt what he should do with it—buy a weapon. Yes, and if possible, food too; food to nourish the arm that would grasp the weapon, food to nourish the body which was the temple of vengeance. When he had had enough bread, he should be able to think and act—to think first how he could hide himself, lest Tito should have him dragged away again.

With that idea of hiding in his mind, Baldassarre turned up the narrowest streets, bought himself some meat and bread, and sat down under the first loggia to eat. The bells that swung out louder and louder peals of joy, laying hold of him and making him vibrate along with all the air, seemed to him simply part of that strong world which was against him.

Romola had watched Baldassarre until he had disappeared round the turning into the Piazza de' Mozzi, half feeling that his departure was a relief, half reproaching herself for not seeking with more decision to know the truth about him, for not assuring herself whether there were any guiltless misery in his lot which she was not helpless to relieve. Yet what

could she have done if the truth had proved to be the burden of some painful secret about her husband, in addition to the anxieties that already weighed upon her? Surely a wife was permitted to desire ignorance of a husband's wrong-doing, since she alone must not protest and warn men against him. But that thought stirred too many intricate fibres of feeling to be pursued now in her weariness. It was a time to rejoice, since help had come to Florence; and she turned into the court to tell the good news to her patients on their straw beds.

She closed the door after her, lest the bells should drown her voice, and then throwing the black drapery from her head, that the women might see her better, she stood in the midst and told them that corn was coming, and that the bells were ringing for gladness at the news. They all sat up to listen, while the children trotted or crawled towards her, and pulled her black skirts, as if they were impatient at being all that long way off her face. She yielded to them, weary as she was, and sat down on the straw, while the little pale things peeped into her basket and pulled her hair down, and the feeble voices around her said, "The Holy Virgin be praised!" "It was the procession!" "The Mother of God has had pity on us!"

At last Romola rose from the heap of straw, too tired to try and smile any longer, saying as she turned up the stone steps,—



“I will come by-and-by, to bring you your dinner.”

“Bless you, madonna! bless you!” said the faint chorus, in much the same tone as that in which they had a few minutes before praised and thanked the unseen Madonna.

Romola cared a great deal for that music. She had no innate taste for tending the sick and clothing the ragged, like some women to whom the details of such work are welcome in themselves, simply as an occupation. Her early training had kept her aloof from such womanly labours; and if she had not brought to them the inspiration of her deepest feelings, they would have been irksome to her. But they had come to be the one unshaken resting-place of her mind, the one narrow pathway on which the light fell clear. If the gulf between herself and Tito which only gathered a more perceptible wideness from her attempts to bridge it by submission, brought a doubt whether, after all, the bond to which she had laboured to be true might not itself be false—if she came away from her confessor, Fra Salvestro, or from some contact with the disciples of Savonarola amongst whom she worshipped, with a sickening sense that these people were miserably narrow, and with an almost impetuous reaction towards her old contempt for their superstition—she found herself recovering a firm footing in her works of womanly sympathy. Whatever else made her doubt, the help she gave to her fellow-citizens made her sure that

Fra Girolamo had been right to call her back. According to his unforgotten words, her place had not been empty: it had been filled with her love and her labour. Florence had had need of her, and the more her own sorrow pressed upon her, the more gladness she felt in the memories, stretching through the two long years, of hours and moments in which she had lightened the burden of life to others. All that ardour of her nature which could no longer spend itself in the woman's tenderness for father and husband, had transformed itself into an enthusiasm of sympathy with the general life. She had ceased to think that her own lot could be happy—had ceased to think of happiness at all: the one end of her life seemed to her to be the diminishing of sorrow.

Her enthusiasm was continually stirred to fresh vigour by the influence of Savonarola. In spite of the wearisome visions and allegories from which she recoiled in disgust when they came as stale repetitions from other lips than his, her strong affinity for his passionate sympathy and the splendour of his aims had lost none of its power. His burning indignation against the abuses and oppression that made the daily story of the Church and of States had kindled the ready fire in her too. His special care for liberty and purity of government in Florence, with his constant reference of this immediate object to the wider end of a universal regeneration, had created in her a new consciousness of the great

drama of human existence in which her life was a part; and through her daily helpful contact with the less fortunate of her fellow-citizens this new consciousness became something stronger than a vague sentiment; it grew into a more and more definite motive of self-denying practice. She thought little about dogmas, and shrank from reflecting closely on the Frate's prophecies of the immediate scourge and closely following regeneration. She had submitted her mind to his and had entered into communion with the Church, because in this way she had found an immediate satisfaction for moral needs which all the previous culture and experience of her life had left hungering. Fra Girolamo's voice had waked in her mind a reason for living, apart from personal enjoyment and personal affection; but it was a reason that seemed to need feeding with greater forces than she possessed within herself, and her submissive use of all offices of the Church was simply a watching and waiting if by any means fresh strength might come. The pressing problem for Romola just then was not to settle questions of controversy, but to keep alive that flame of unselfish emotion by which a life of sadness might still be a life of active love.

Her trust in Savonarola's nature as greater than her own made a large part of the strength she had found. And the trust was not to be lightly shaken. It is not force of intellect which causes ready re-

pulsion from the aberrations and eccentricities of greatness, any more than it is force of vision that causes the eye to explore the warts on a face bright with human expression; it is simply the negation of high sensibilities. Romola was so deeply moved by the grand energies of Savonarola's nature, that she found herself listening patiently to all dogmas and prophecies, when they came in the vehicle of his ardent faith and believing utterance.\*

No soul is desolate as long as there is a human being for whom it can feel trust and reverence. Romola's trust in Savonarola was something like a rope suspended securely by her path, making her step elastic while she grasped it; if it were suddenly removed, no firmness of the ground she trod could save her from staggering, or perhaps from falling.

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\* He himself had had occasion enough to note the efficacy of that vehicle. "If," he says in the *Compendium Revelationum*, "you speak of such as have not heard these things from me, I admit that they who disbelieve are more than they who believe, because it is one thing to hear him who inwardly feels these things, and another to hear him who feels them not; . . . and, therefore, it is well said by St. Jerome, 'Habet nescio quid latentis energiæ vivæ vocis actus, et in aures discipuli de auctoris ore transfusa fortis sonat.'"

## CHAPTER XXV.

## AT THE BARBER'S SHOP.

AFTER that welcome appearance as the messenger with the olive-branch, which was an unpromised favour of fortune, Tito had other commissions to fulfil of a more premeditated character. He paused at the Palazzo Vecchio, and awaited there the return of the Ten, who managed external and war affairs, that he might duly deliver to them the results of his private mission to Pisa, intended as a preliminary to an avowed embassy of which Bernardo Rucellai was to be the head, with the object of coming, if possible, to a pacific understanding with the Emperor Maximilian and the League.

Tito's talents for diplomatic work had been well ascertained, and as he gave with fulness and precision the results of his inquiries and interviews, Bernardo del Nero, who was at that time one of the Ten, could not withhold his admiration. He would have withheld it if he could; for his original dislike of Tito had returned, and become stronger, since the sale of the library. Romola had never uttered a word to

her godfather on the circumstances of the sale, and Bernardo had understood her silence as a prohibition to him to enter on the subject, but he felt sure that the breach of her father's wish had been a blighting grief to her, and the old man's observant eyes discerned other indications that her married life was not happy.

“Ah,” he said, inwardly, “that doubtless is the reason she has taken to listening to Fra Girolamo, and going amongst the Piagnoni, which I never expected from her. These women, if they are not happy, and have no children, must either take to folly or to some overstrained religion that makes them think they've got all heaven's work on their shoulders. And as for my poor child Romola, it is as I always said—the cramming with Latin and Greek has left her as much a woman as if she had done nothing all day but prick her fingers with the needle. And this husband of hers, who gets employed everywhere, because he's a tool with a smooth handle, I wish Tornabuoni and the rest may not find their fingers cut. Well, well, *solco torto, sacco dritto*—many a full sack comes from a crooked furrow; and he who will be captain of none but honest men will have small hire to pay.”

With this long-established conviction that there could be no moral sifting of political agents, the old Florentine abstained from all interference in Tito's disfavour. Apart from what must be kept sacred

and private for Romola's sake, Bernardo had nothing distinct to allege against the useful Greek, except that he was a Greek, and that he, Bernardo, did not like him; for the doubleness of feigning attachment to the popular government, while at heart a Medicean, was common to Tito with more than half the Medicean party. He only feigned with more skill than the rest: that was all. So Bernardo was simply cold to Tito, who returned the coldness with a scrupulous, distant respect. And it was still the notion in Florence that the old tie between Bernardo and Bardo made any service done to Romola's husband an acceptable homage to her godfather.

After delivering himself of his charge at the Old Palace, Tito felt that the avowed official work of the day was done. He was tired and adust with long riding; but he did not go home. There were certain things in his scarsella and on his mind, from which he wished to free himself as soon as possible, but the opportunities must be found so skilfully that they must not seem to be sought. He walked from the Palazzo in a sauntering fashion towards the Piazza del Duomo. The procession was at an end now, but the bells were still ringing, and the people were moving about the streets restlessly, longing for some more definite vent to their joy. If the Frate could have stood up in the great Piazza and preached to them, they might have been satisfied, but now, in spite of the new discipline which declared Christ to

be the special King of the Florentines and required all pleasures to be of a Christian sort, there was a secret longing in many of the youngsters who shouted "Viva Gesù!" for a little vigorous stone-throwing in sign of thankfulness.

Tito, as he passed along, could not escape being recognized by some as the welcome bearer of the olive-branch, and could only rid himself of an inconvenient ovation, chiefly in the form of eager questions, by telling those who pressed on him that Meo di Sasso, the true messenger from Leghorn, must now be entering, and might certainly be met towards the Porta San Frediano. He could tell much more than Tito knew.

Freeing himself from importunities in this adroit manner, he made his way to the Piazza del Duomo, casting his long eyes round the space with an air of the utmost carelessness, but really seeking to detect some presence which might furnish him with one of his desired opportunities. The fact of the procession having terminated at the Duomo made it probable that there would be more than the usual concentration of loungers and talkers in the Piazza and round Nello's shop. It was as he expected. There was a group leaning against the rails near the north gates of the Baptistery, so exactly what he sought, that he looked more indifferent than ever, and seemed to recognize the tallest member of the group entirely by chance as he had half passed him, just turning his



head to give him a slight greeting, while he tossed the end of his *becchetto* over his left shoulder.

Yet the tall, broad-shouldered personage greeted in that slight way looked like one who had considerable claims. He wore a richly embroidered tunic, with a great show of linen, after the newest French mode, and at his belt there hung a sword and poignard of fine workmanship. His hat, with a red plume in it, seemed a scornful protest against the gravity of Florentine costume, which had been exaggerated to the utmost under the influence of the Piagnoni. Certain undefinable indications of youth made the breadth of his face and the large diameter of his waist appear the more emphatically a stamp of coarseness, and his eyes had that rude desecrating stare at all men and things which to a refined mind is as intolerable as a bad odour or a flaring light.

He and his companions, also young men dressed expensively and wearing arms, were exchanging jokes with that sort of ostentatious laughter which implies a desire to prove that the laughter is not mortified though some people might suspect it. There were good reasons for such a suspicion; for this broad-shouldered man with the red feather was Dolfo Spini, leader of the Compagnacci, or Evil Companions—that is to say, of all the dissolute young men belonging to the old aristocratic party, enemies of the Mediceans, enemies of the popular government, but still more bitter enemies of Savonarola. Dolfo Spini, heir of the

great house with the loggia, over the bridge of the Santa Trinità, had organized these young men into an armed band, as sworn champions of extravagant suppers and all the pleasant sins of the flesh, against reforming pietists who threatened to make the world chaste and temperate to so intolerable a degree that there would soon be no reason for living, except the extreme unpleasantness of the alternative. Up to this very morning he had been loudly declaring that Florence was given up to famine and ruin entirely through its blind adherence to the advice of the Frate, and that there could be no salvation for Florence but in joining the League and driving the Frate out of the city—sending him to Rome, in fact, whither he ought to have gone long ago in obedience to the summons of the Pope. It was suspected, therefore, that Messer Dolfo Spini's heart was not a-glow with pure joy at the unexpected succours which had come in apparent fulfilment of the Frate's prediction, and the laughter, which was ringing out afresh as Tito joined the group at Nello's door, did not serve to dissipate the suspicion. For leaning against the door-post in the centre of the group was a close-shaven, keen-eyed personage, named Niccolò Macchiavelli, who, young as he was, had penetrated all the small secrets of egoism.

“Messer Dolfo's head,” he was saying, “is more of a pumpkin than I thought. I measure men's dulness by the devices they trust in for deceiving

others. Your dullest animal of all is he who grins and says he doesn't mind just after he has had his shins kicked. If I were a trifle duller now," he went on, smiling as the circle opened to admit Tito, "I should pretend to be fond of this Melema, who has got a secretaryship that would exactly suit me—as if Latin ill-paid could love better Latin that's better paid! Melema, you are a pestiferously clever fellow, very much in my way, and I'm sorry to hear you've had another piece of good luck to-day."

"Questionable luck, Niccolò," said Tito, touching him on the shoulder in a friendly way; "I have got nothing by it yet but being laid hold of and breathed upon by wool-beaters, when I am as soiled and battered with riding as a *tabellario* (letter-carrier) from Bologna."

"Ah! you want a touch of my art, Messer Oratore," said Nello, who had come forward at the sound of Tito's voice; "your chin, I perceive, has yesterday's crop upon it. Come, come—consign yourself to the priest of all the Muses. Sandro, quick with the lather!"

"In truth, Nello, that is just what I most desire at this moment," said Tito, seating himself; "and that was why I turned my steps towards thy shop, instead of going home at once, when I had done my business at the Palazzo."

"Yes, indeed, it is not fitting that you should present yourself to Madonna Romola with a rusty chin

and a tangled *zazzera*. Nothing that is not dainty ought to approach the Florentine lily; though I see her constantly going about like a sunbeam amongst the rags that line our corners—if indeed she is not more like a moonbeam now, for I thought yesterday, when I met her, that she looked as pale and worn as that fainting Madonna of Fra Giovanni's. You must see to it, my *bel erudito*: she keeps too many fasts and vigils in your absence."

Tito gave a melancholy shrug. "It is too true, Nello. She has been depriving herself of half her proper food every day during this famine. But what can I do? Her mind has been set all a-flame. A husband's influence is powerless against the Frate's."

"As every other influence is likely to be, that of the Holy Father included," said Domenico Cennini, one of the group at the door, who had turned in with Tito. "I don't know whether you have gathered anything at Pisa about the way the wind sits at Rome, Melema?"

"Secrets of the council chamber, Messer Domenico!" said Tito, smiling and opening his palms in a deprecatory manner. "An envoy must be as dumb as a father confessor."

"Certainly, certainly," said Cennini. "I ask for no breach of that rule. Well, my belief is, that if his Holiness were to drive Fra Girolamo to extremity, the Frate would move heaven and earth to get a General Council of the Church—ay, and

would get it too; and I, for one, should not be sorry, though I'm no Piagnone."

"With leave of your greater experience, Messer Domenico," said Macchiavelli, "I must differ from you—not in your wish to see a General Council which might reform the Church, but in your belief that the Frate will checkmate his Holiness. The Frate's game is an impossible one. If he had contented himself with preaching against the vices of Rome, and with prophesying that in some way, not mentioned, Italy would be scourged, depend upon it, Pope Alexander would have allowed him to spend his breath in that way as long as he could find hearers. Such spiritual blasts as those knock no walls down. But the Frate wants to be something more than a spiritual trumpet: he wants to be a lever, and what is more, he *is* a lever. He wants to spread the doctrine of Christ by maintaining a popular government in Florence, and the Pope, as I know, on the best authority, has private views to the contrary."

"Then Florence will stand by the Frate," Cennini broke in, with some fervour. "I myself should prefer that he would let his prophesying alone, but if our freedom to choose our own government is to be attacked—I am an obedient son of the Church, but I would vote for resisting Pope Alexander the Sixth, as our forefathers resisted Pope Gregory the Eleventh."

“But pardon me, Messer Domenico,” said Macchiavelli, sticking his thumbs into his belt, and speaking with that cool enjoyment of exposition which surmounts every other force in discussion. “Have you correctly seized the Frate’s position? How is it that he has become a lever, and made himself worth attacking by an acute man like his Holiness? Because he has got the ear of the people: because he gives them threats and promises, which they believe come straight from God, not only about hell, purgatory, and paradise, but about Pisa and our Great Council. But let events go against him, so as to shake the people’s faith, and the cause of his power will be the cause of his fall. He is accumulating three sorts of hatred on his head—the hatred of average mankind against every one who wants to lay on them a strict yoke of virtue; the hatred of the stronger powers in Italy who want to farm Florence for their own purposes; and the hatred of the people, to whom he has ventured to promise good in this world, instead of confining his promises to the next. If a prophet is to keep his power, he must be a prophet like Mahomet, with an army at his back, that when the people’s faith is fainting it may be frightened into life again.”

“Rather sum up the three sorts of hatred in one,” said Francesco Cei, impetuously, “and say he has won the hatred of all men who have sense and honesty, by inventing hypocritical lies. His proper

place is among the false prophets in the Inferno, who walk with their heads turned hindforemost."

"You are too angry, my Francesco," said Macchiavelli, smiling; "you poets are apt to cut the clouds in your wrath. I am no votary of the Frate's, and would not lay down my little finger for his veracity. But veracity is a plant of paradise, and the seeds have never flourished beyond the walls. You yourself, my Francesco, tell poetical lies only; partly compelled by the poet's fervour, partly to please your audience; but you object to lies in prose. Well, the Frate differs from you as to the boundary of poetry, that's all. When he gets into the pulpit of the Duomo, he has the fervour within him, and without him he has the audience to please. Ecco!"

"You are somewhat lax there, Niccolò," said Cennini, gravely. "I myself believe in the Frate's integrity, though I don't believe in his prophecies, and as long as his integrity is not disproved, we have a popular party strong enough to protect him and resist foreign interference."

"A party that seems strong enough," said Macchiavelli, with a shrug, and an almost imperceptible glance towards Tito, who was abandoning himself with much enjoyment to Nello's combing and scenting. "But how many Mediceans are there among you? How many who will not be turned round by a private grudge?"

“As to the Mediceans,” said Cennini, “I believe there is very little genuine feeling left on behalf of the Medici. Who would risk much for Piero de’ Medici? A few old staunch friends, perhaps, like Bernardo del Nero; but even some of those most connected with the family are hearty friends of the popular government, and would exert themselves for the Frate. I was talking to Giannozzo Pucci only a little while ago, and I’m convinced there’s nothing he would set his face against more than against any attempt to alter the new order of things.”

“You are right there, Messer Domenico,” said Tito, with a laughing meaning in his eyes, as he rose from the shaving-chair; “and I fancy the tender passion came in aid of hard theory there. I am persuaded there was some jealousy at the bottom of Giannozzo’s alienation from Piero de’ Medici; else so amiable a creature as he would never feel the bitterness he sometimes allows to escape him in that quarter. He was in the procession with you, I suppose?”

“No,” said Cennini; “he is at his villa—went there three days ago.”

Tito was settling his cap and glancing down at his splashed hose as if he hardly heeded the answer. In reality he had obtained a much-desired piece of information. He had at that moment in his scarsella a crushed gold ring which he had engaged to deliver to Giannozzo Pucci. He had received it from an



envoy of Piero de' Medici, whom he had ridden out of his way to meet at Certaldo on the Siena road. Since Pucci was not in the town, he would send the ring by Fra Michele, a Carthusian lay Brother in the service of the Mediceans, and the receipt of that sign would bring Pucci back to hear the verbal part of Tito's mission.

“Behold him!” said Nello, flourishing his comb and pointing it at Tito, “the handsomest scholar in the world or in the wolds,\* now he has passed through my hands! A trifle thinner in the face, though, than when he came in his first bloom to Florence—eh? and, I vow, there are some lines just faintly hinting themselves about your mouth, Messer Oratore! Ah, mind is an enemy to beauty! I myself was thought beautiful by the women at one time—when I was in my swaddling-bands. But now—oimè! I carry my unwritten poems in cipher on my face!”

Tito, laughing with the rest as Nello looked at himself tragically in the hand-mirror, made a sign of farewell to the company generally, and took his departure.

“I'm of our old Piero di Cosimo's mind,” said Francesco Cei. “I don't half like Melema. That trick of smiling gets stronger than ever—no wonder he has lines about the mouth.”

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\* “Del mondo o di maremma.”

“He’s too successful,” said Macchiavelli, playfully. “I’m sure there’s something wrong about him, else he wouldn’t have that secretaryship.”

“He’s an able man,” said Cennini, in a tone of judicial fairness. “I and my brother have always found him useful with our Greek sheets, and he gives great satisfaction to the Ten. I like to see a young man work his way upward by merit. And the secretary Scala, who befriended him from the first, thinks highly of him still, I know.”

“Doubtless,” said a notary in the background. “He writes Scala’s official letters for him, or corrects them, and gets well paid for it too.”

“I wish Messer Bartolommeo would pay *me* to doctor his gouty Latin,” said Macchiavelli, with a shrug. “Did *he* tell you about the pay, Ser Ceccone, or was it Melema himself?” he added, looking at the notary with a face ironically innocent.

“Melema? no, indeed,” answered Ser Ceccone. “He is as close as a nut. He never brags. That’s why he’s employed everywhere. They say he’s getting rich with doing all sorts of underhand work.”

“It *is* a little too bad,” said Macchiavelli, “and so many able notaries out of employment!”

“Well, I must say I thought that was a nasty story a year or two ago about the man who said he had stolen jewels,” said Cei. “It got hushed up somehow; but I remember Piero di Cosimo said, at the time, he believed there was something in it, for

he saw Melema's face when the man laid hold of him, and he never saw a visage so 'painted with fear,' as our sour old Dante says."

"Come, spit no more of that venom, Francesco," said Nello, getting indignant, "else I shall consider it a public duty to cut your hair awry the next time I get you under my scissors. That story of the stolen jewels was a lie. Bernardo Rucellai and the Magnificent Eight knew all about it. The man was a dangerous madman, and he was very properly kept out of mischief in prison. As for our Piero di Cosimo, his wits are running after the wind of Mongibello: he has such an extravagant fancy that he would take a lizard for a crocodile. No: that story has been dead and buried too long—our noses object to it."

"It is true," said Macchiavelli. "You forget the danger of the precedent, Francesco. The next mad beggarman may accuse you of stealing his verses, or me, God help me! of stealing his coppers. Ah!" he went on, turning towards the door, "Dolfo Spini has carried his red feather out of the Piazza. That captain of swaggerers would like the Republic to lose Pisa just for the chance of seeing the people tear the frock off the Frate's back. With your pardon, Francesco—I know he is a friend of yours—there are few things I should like better than to see him play the part of Capo d' Oca, who went out to the tournament blowing his trumpets and returned with them in a bag."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## BY A STREET LAMP.

THAT evening, when it was dark and threatening rain, Romola, returning with Maso and the lantern by her side, from the hospital of San Matteo, which she had visited after vespers, encountered her husband just issuing from the monastery of San Marco. Tito, who had gone out again shortly after his arrival in the Via de' Bardi, and had seen little of Romola during the day, immediately proposed to accompany her home, dismissing Maso, whose short steps annoyed him. It was only usual for him to pay her such an official attention when it was obviously demanded from him. Tito and Romola never jarred, never remonstrated with each other. They were too hopelessly alienated in their inner life ever to have that contest which is an effort towards agreement. They talked of all affairs, public and private, with careful adherence to an adopted course. If Tito wanted a supper prepared in the old library, now pleasantly furnished as a banqueting-room, Romola

assented, and saw that everything needful was done ; and Tito, on his side, left her entirely uncontrolled in her daily habits, accepting the help she offered him in transcribing or making digests, and in return meeting her conjectured want of supplies for her charities. Yet he constantly, as on this very morning, avoided exchanging glances with her ; affected to believe that she was out of the house, in order to avoid seeking her in her own room ; and playfully attributed to her a perpetual preference of solitude to his society.

In the first ardour of her self-conquest, after she had renounced her resolution of flight, Romola had made many timid efforts towards the return of a frank relation between them. But to her such a relation could only come by open speech about their differences, and the attempt to arrive at a moral understanding ; while Tito could only be saved from alienation from her by such a recovery of her effusive tenderness as would have supposed oblivion of their differences. He cared for no explanation between them ; he felt any thorough explanation impossible : he would have cared to have Romola fond again, and to her, fondness was impossible. She could be submissive and gentle, she could repress any sign of repulsion ; but tenderness was not to be feigned. She was helplessly conscious of the result : her husband was alienated from her.

It was an additional reason why she should be care-

fully kept outside of secrets which he would in no case have chosen to communicate to her. With regard to his political action he sought to convince her that he considered the cause of the Medici hopeless; and that on that practical ground, as well as in theory, he heartily served the popular government, in which she had now a warm interest. But impressions subtle as odours made her uneasy about his relations with San Marco. She was painfully divided between the dread of seeing any evidence to arouse her suspicions, and the impulse to watch lest any harm should come that she might have arrested.

As they walked together this evening, Tito said:—  
“The business of the day is not yet quite ended for me. I shall conduct you to our door, my Romola, and then I must fulfil another commission, which will take me an hour, perhaps, before I can return and rest, as I very much need to do.”

And then he talked amusingly of what he had seen at Pisa, until they were close upon a loggia, near which there hung a lamp before a picture of the Virgin. The street was a quiet one, and hitherto they had passed few people; but now there was a sound of many approaching footsteps and confused voices.

“We shall not get home without a wetting, unless we take shelter under this convenient loggia,” Tito said, hastily, hurrying Romola with a slightly startled movement, up the step of the loggia.

“Surely it is useless to wait for this small drizzling rain,” said Romola, in surprise.

“No; I felt it becoming heavier. Let us wait a little.” With that wakefulness to the faintest indication which belongs to a mind habitually in a state of caution, Tito had detected by the glimmer of the lamp that the leader of the advancing group wore a red feather and a glittering sword-hilt—in fact, was almost the last person in the world he would have chosen to meet at this hour with Romola by his side. He had already during the day had one momentous interview with Dolfo Spini, and the business he had spoken of to Romola as yet to be done was a second interview with that personage, a sequence of the visit he had paid at San Marco. Tito, by a long preconcerted plan, had been the bearer of letters to Savonarola—carefully forged letters; one of them, by a stratagem, bearing the very signature and seal of the Cardinal of Naples, who of all the Sacred College had most exerted his influence at Rome in favour of the Frate. The purport of the letters was to state that the Cardinal was on his progress from Pisa, and, unwilling for strong reasons to enter Florence, yet desirous of taking counsel with Savonarola at this difficult juncture, intended to pause this very day at San Casciano, about ten miles from the city, whence he would ride out the next morning in the plain garb of a priest, and meet Savonarola, as if casually, five miles on the Florence road, two hours after sunrise.

The plot, of which these forged letters were the initial step, was that Dolfo Spini with a band of his Compagnacci was to be posted in ambush on the road, at a lonely spot about five miles from the gates; that he was to seize Savonarola with the Dominican brother who would accompany him according to rule, and deliver him over to a small detachment of Milanese horse in readiness near San Casciano, by whom he was to be carried into the Roman territory.

There was a strong chance that the penetrating Frate would suspect a trap, and decline to incur the risk, which he had for some time avoided, of going beyond the city walls. Even when he preached, his friends held it necessary that he should be attended by an armed guard; and here he was called on to commit himself to a solitary road, with no other attendant than a fellow monk. On this ground the minimum of time had been given him for decision, and the chance in favour of his acting on the letters was, that the eagerness with which his mind was set on the combining of interests within and without the Church towards the procuring of a General Council, and also the expectation of immediate service from the Cardinal in the actual juncture of his contest with the Pope, would triumph over his shrewdness and caution in the brief space allowed for deliberation.

Tito had had an audience of Savonarola, having declined to put the letters into any hands but his,



and with consummate art had admitted that incidentally, and by inference, he was able so far to conjecture their purport as to believe they referred to a rendezvous outside the gates, in which case he urged that the Frate should seek an armed guard from the Signoria, and offered his services in carrying the request with the utmost privacy. Savonarola had replied briefly that this was impossible: an armed guard was incompatible with privacy. He spoke with a flashing eye, and Tito felt convinced that he meant to incur the risk.

Tito himself did not much care for the result. He managed his affairs so cleverly, that all results, he considered, must turn to his advantage. Whichever party came uppermost, he was secure of favour and money. That is an indecorously naked statement; the fact, clothed as Tito habitually clothed it, was that his acute mind, discerning the equal hollowness of all parties, took the only rational course in making them subservient to his own interest.

If Savonarola fell into the snare, there were diamonds in question and papal patronage; if not, Tito's adroit agency had strengthened his position with Savonarola and with Spini, while any confidences he obtained from them made him the more valuable as an agent of the Mediceans.

But Spini was an inconvenient colleague. He had cunning enough to delight in plots, but not

the ability or self-command necessary to so complex an effect as secrecy. He frequently got excited with drinking, for even sober Florence had its "Beoni," or toppers, both lay and clerical, who became loud at taverns and private banquets; and in spite of the agreement between him and Tito, that their public recognition of each other should invariably be of the coolest sort, there was always the possibility that on an evening encounter he would be suddenly blurring and affectionate. The delicate sign of casting the *becchetto* over the left shoulder was understood in the morning, but the strongest hint short of a threat might not suffice to keep off a fraternal grasp of the shoulder in the evening.

Tito's chief hope now was that Dolfo Spini had not caught sight of him, and the hope would have been well-founded if Spini had had no clearer view of him than he had caught of Spini. But, himself in shadow, he had seen Tito illuminated for an instant by the direct rays of the lamp, and Tito in his way was as strongly-marked a personage as the captain of the *Compagnacci*. Romola's black shrouded figure had escaped notice, and she now stood behind her husband's shoulder in the corner of the *loggia*. Tito was not left to hope long.

"Ha! my carrier-pigeon!" grated Spini's harsh voice, in what he meant to be an under-tone, while his hand grasped Tito's shoulder; "what did you run into hiding for? You didn't know it was com-

rades who were coming. It's well I caught sight of you; it saves time. What of the chase to-morrow morning? Will the bald-headed game rise? Are the falcons to be got ready?"

If it had been in Tito's nature to feel an access of rage, he would have felt it against this bull-faced accomplice, unfit either for a leader or a tool. His lips turned white, but his excitement came from the pressing difficulty of choosing a safe device. If he attempted to hush Spini, that would only deepen Romola's suspicion, and he knew her well enough to know that if some strong alarm were roused in her, she was neither to be silenced nor hoodwinked: on the other hand, if he repelled Spini angrily the wine-breathing Compagnaccio might become savage, being more ready at resentment than at the divination of motives. He adopted a third course, which proved that Romola retained one sort of power over him—the power of dread.

He pressed her hand, as if intending a hint to her, and said in a good-humoured tone of comradeship,—

“Yes, my Dolfo, you may prepare in all security. But take no trumpets with you.”

“Don't be afraid,” said Spini, a little piqued. “No need to play Ser Saccente with me. I know where the devil keeps his tail as well as you do. What! he swallowed the bait whole? The prophetic nose didn't scent the hook at all?” he went on, lowering his tone a little, with a blundering sense of secrecy.

“The brute will not be satisfied till he has emptied the bag,” thought Tito; but aloud he said,—“Swallowed all as easily as you swallow a cup of Trebbiano. Ha! I see torches: there must be a dead body coming. The pestilence has been spreading, I hear.”

“Santiddio! I hate the sight of those biers. Good-night,” said Spini, hastily moving off.

The torches were really coming, but they preceded a church dignitary who was returning homeward; the suggestion of the dead body and the pestilence was Tito’s device for getting rid of Spini without telling him to go. The moment he had moved away, Tito turned to Romola, and said, quietly,—

“Do not be alarmed by anything that *bestia* has said, my Romola. We will go on now: I think the rain has not increased.”

She was quivering with indignant resolution; it was of no use for Tito to speak in that unconcerned way. She distrusted every word he could utter.

“I will not go on,” she said. “I will not move nearer home until I have some security against this treachery being perpetrated.”

“Wait, at least, until these torches have passed,” said Tito, with perfect self-command, but with a new rising of dislike to a wife who this time, he foresaw, might have the power of thwarting him in spite of the husband’s predominance.

The torches passed, with the Vicario dell’ Arcives-

covo, and due reverence was done by Tito, but Romola saw nothing outward. If for the defeat of this treachery, in which she believed with all the force of long presentiment, it had been necessary at that moment for her to spring on her husband and hurl herself with him down a precipice, she felt as if she could have done it. Union with this man! At that moment the self-quelling discipline of two years seemed to be nullified: she felt nothing but that they were divided.

They were nearly in darkness again, and could only see each other's faces dimly.

"Tell me the truth, Tito—this time tell me the truth," said Romola, in a low quivering voice. "It will be safer for you."

"Why should I desire to tell you anything else, my angry saint?" said Tito, with a slight touch of contempt, which was the vent of his annoyance; "since the truth is precisely that over which you have most reason to rejoice—namely, that my knowing a plot of Spini's enables me to secure the Frate from falling a victim to it."

"What is the plot?"

"That I decline to tell," said Tito. "It is enough that the Frate's safety will be secured."

"It is a plot for drawing him outside the gates that Spini may murder him."

"There has been no intention of murder. It is simply a plot for compelling him to obey the Pope's

summons to Rome. But as I serve the popular government, and think the Frate's presence here is a necessary means of maintaining it at present, I choose to prevent his departure. You may go to sleep with entire ease of mind to-night."

For a moment Romola was silent. Then she said, in a voice of anguish, "Tito, it is of no use: I have no belief in you."

She could just discern his action as he shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his palms in silence. That cold dislike which is the anger of unimpassioned beings was hardening within him.

"If the Frate leaves the city—if any harm happens to him," said Romola, after a slight pause, in a new tone of indignant resolution,—“I will declare what I have heard to the Signoria, and you will be disgraced. What if I am your wife?” she went on, impetuously; “I will be disgraced with you. If we are united, I am that part of you that will save you from crime. Others shall not be betrayed.”

“I am quite aware of what you would be likely to do, *anima mia*,” said Tito, in the coolest of his liquid tones; therefore if you have a small amount of reasoning at your disposal just now, consider that if you believe me in nothing else, you may believe me when I say I will take care of myself, and not put it in your power to ruin me.”

“Then you assure me that the Frate is warned—he will not go beyond the gates?”

“He shall not go beyond the gates.”

There was a moment's pause, but distrust was not to be expelled.

“I will go back to San Marco now and find out,” Romola said, making a movement forward.

“You shall not!” said Tito, in a bitter whisper, seizing her wrists with all his masculine force. “I am master of you. You shall not set yourself in opposition to me.”

There were passers-by approaching. Tito had heard them, and that was why he spoke in a whisper. Romola was too conscious of being mastered to have struggled, even if she had remained unconscious that witnesses were at hand. But she was aware now of footsteps and voices, and her habitual sense of personal dignity made her at once yield to Tito's movement towards leading her from the loggia.

They walked on in silence for some time, under the small drizzling rain. The first rush of indignation and alarm in Romola had begun to give way to more complicated feelings, which rendered speech and action difficult. In that simpler state of vehemence, open opposition to the husband from whom she felt her soul revolting, had had the aspect of temptation for her; it seemed the easiest of all courses. But now, habits of self-questioning, memories of impulse subdued, and that proud reserve which all discipline had left unmodified, began to emerge from the flood of passion. The

grasp of her wrists, which asserted her husband's physical predominance, instead of arousing a new fierceness in her, as it might have done if her impetuosity had been of a more vulgar kind, had given her a momentary shuddering horror at this form of contest with him. It was the first time they had been in declared hostility to each other since her flight and return, and the check given to her ardent resolution then retained the power to arrest her now. In this altered condition her mind began to dwell on the probabilities that would save her from any desperate course: Tito would not risk betrayal by her; whatever had been his original intention, he must be determined now by the fact that she knew of the plot. She was not bound now to do anything else than to hang over him that certainty that if he deceived her, her lips would not be closed. And then, it was possible—yes, she must cling to that possibility till it was disproved—that Tito had never meant to aid in the betrayal of the Frate.

Tito, on his side, was busy with thoughts, and did not speak again till they were near home. Then he said—

“ Well, Romola, have you now had time to recover calmness? If so, you can supply your want of belief in me by a little rational inference: you can see, I presume, that if I had had any intention of furthering Spini's plot I should now be aware that the possession of a fair Piagnone for my wife, who



knows the secret of the plot, would be a serious obstacle in my way."

Tito assumed the tone which was just then the easiest to him, conjecturing that in Romola's present mood persuasive deprecation would be lost upon her.

"Yes, Tito," she said, in a low voice, "I think you believe that I would guard the Republic from further treachery. You are right to believe it: if the Frate is betrayed, I will denounce you." She paused a moment, and then said, with an effort, "But it was not so. I have perhaps spoken too hastily—you never meant it. Only, why will you seem to be that man's comrade?"

"Such relations are inevitable to practical men, my Romola," said Tito, gratified by discerning the struggle within her. "You fair creatures live in the clouds. Pray go to rest with an easy heart," he added, opening the door for her.

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